

Wrong Wife

4fanci

Harry Potter

Complete



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Summary

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Description:

A sequel to Wrong Life by camnz. Hermione Granger is now Astoria Malfoy. After ten years of marriage to Draco, she misses being Hermione. Just a bit. Thanks to camnz for encouraging me to turn my imaginings into a story.
COMPLETE

Chapter One: Friends

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Wrong Wife

Chapter One— Friends

Golden morning light filtered through the windows. Hermione stared at herself in the mirror. Seeing Astoria's reflection made her sigh. Ten years ago, at age 28, Hermione's life had come to a dramatic end when a chimney fell on her. Yes, Hermione Granger had died, but then awakened in Astoria Greengrass Malfoy's body. She had found herself married to *Draco Malfoy*, her childhood nemesis, of all people!

A mischievous grin caught her lips as she surveyed the damage she'd done to Astoria's once perfect body and flawless face during the last ten years. Four children later and one more on the way... she had a lot more padding on her hips and waist. Astoria's once perfect breasts now needed support. Her eyes had laughter lines and her perfectly styled hair was increasingly unruly because Hermione forgot to brush. The lovely tan was gone. Even her face seemed rounder with the extra weight she was carrying. Astoria would have screamed in horror, but Hermione laughed. To have her dream come true... children in her life to love and a husband who treated her like a miracle straight from the gods... all while living in the body of a pureblood witch had to have been someone's idea of a good joke. So Hermione laughed.

Hermione lived her life as Astoria, but she raised her children and loved her husband as Hermione. She taught them kindness, fairness, and love, gentleness and family affection. She introduced them to the Muggle world and read them Muggle books. She made Malfoy Manor comfortable and happy, because she was a comfortable and happy person.

Draco Malfoy stepped into her dressing room and slipped his arm around his wife's thick waist, bending to nuzzle her neck.

"I never dreamt that I would have a family rivaling the Weasleys in number," he muttered somewhat bitterly. It might have sounded hostile, except that he said it with a kiss.

"Mmmm. We could stop at five, you know. I'm almost 40, but Astoria is only 37. There's still time for more."

"Five is definitely enough. No more children."

"But then you thought one was enough, remember?"

Yes, he did remember. He smiled at her and his grey eyes warmed.

It was an argument that she had won after months of debate. It turned out that the Malfoys and other purebloods actually had a logical reason for only bearing one child: in a power

hungry society, it just wasn't safe to have more than one son in the family. Too many eldest sons had mysteriously died, enabling younger sons to inherit the fortune, much like the kings of Muggle England in days long past. Even cousins could be potentially dangerous. Many pureblood families were embroiled with politics, backstabbing, and evil plots; the women were no better than the men. Witness Pansy Parkinson who murdered Astoria so she could marry Draco herself. Luckily, crazy Pansy Parkinson was now locked away in a sanatorium in Switzerland.

Hermione eventually won Draco over by pledging to train their many children to love each other and treat each other well. She asked Draco to tone down the role of the Malfoy family honor and prestige so that jealousy and pride wouldn't damage family relationships. She taught them to share. So far her strategy had worked, but she secretly suspected that they had been spared a child with Slytherin traits of jealousy, competition, scheming, and manipulation. It was the old nature vs. nurture argument: Did the children get along because they were trained to take care of each other or did they get along because they had compliant personalities? Hopefully, they wouldn't all end up in the Hufflepuff house at Hogwarts.

"If we have the babies close together," Hermione had suggested reasonably to Draco, "then they won't ever remember life without their siblings. There won't be as much jealousy. They'll always remember playing together and being friends." Eventually, he agreed, most likely because he enjoyed the extra time they spent together making all those babies.

Lucius and Narcissa were scandalized at the number of grandchildren that had increased their family size, but they were at the same time so grateful for an heir at all that they kept quiet. Draco's early marriage with Astoria had almost not survived Astoria's affairs and they had despaired of ever obtaining an heir. Lucius and Narcissa never suspected that Astoria Malfoy was really Hermione Granger. The clues were there: Instead of gossip fests, Astoria now supported non profit causes for magical creatures; rather than shopping, she preferred the library; and her passion for pureblood society had transformed into an alarming interest in all things Muggle. These oddities they put up with because their son was happy and their grandchildren were happy. They didn't really want to know more.

"So, I have some items on the agenda," Hermione mentioned to Draco as she ran a brush through her hair.

"Agenda? Is this a business meeting or a dinner date?"

"Date, of course, but we still need to talk about some things."

"Really? A trip into Muggle World? New books for the library? Knitting lessons for the kids?" drawled Draco with a sneer. Hermione gazed at her very handsome blond husband and chuckled at the twinkle in his gray eyes.

"No, this plan is something new. Are you ready for this? I want the Malfoys to become friends with the Potters and the Weasleys."

Draco was silent at first. Besides himself, only Harry knew that Astoria was really Hermione. They had kept in touch, but their children had never met. That was now going to change?

"Mmmm. No. Absolutely not. Malfoys do NOT befriend Potheads and Weasels."

“OK. How about Malfoy *children* befriending Potter and Weasley *children*.”

“No. Absolutely not. Malfoy children do NOT befriend Pothead and Weasel children.”

Hermione smirked. “OK. How about Malfoy children befriending Potter children? No Weasleys?”

Draco frowned. “Well, Potter’s children are half Weasley. I don’t see how we can get away from them. Weasleys are taking over the world.”

“That, dear husband, is why the Malfoys are repopulating the magical world. We must increase our number. We must improve our status and influence. And by the way, *I want our children to be friendly with the Potters and the Weasleys*. Before they get to Hogwarts.”

Scorpius, their oldest son was nine; Hermione had been preparing him for Hogwarts since he was three. Pureblood families hired tutors for their children, but Hermione did most of the tutoring herself. She did not trust many outside of the family to teach her children to read and write and cipher. Nor did she trust someone outside of herself or Draco to teach their children ethics and morality. Her children would be prepared academically. Now, she needed them to be prepared socially. They needed friends (Gryffindor friends) and the Malfoys had lived a rather isolated life the last ten years.

This was going to change, Hermione knew. So did Draco.

Chapter Two: Ideas

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Chapter Two— New Ideas

Draco and his wife were led to their secluded table by the maitre d' at Sertrini's. They had a lovely view of the city lights below. Hermione's lips twitched at the heads that turned in the posh restaurant. She would absolutely never get used to being this attractive. Even though she was pregnant and pushing forty, Astoria's height and coloring lent an illusion of ethereal slimness. The Malfoys looked nothing if not regal.

Hermione had finally found a Muggle clothing designer whose fashions were soft and comfortable while maintaining the svelte sophistication that Draco seemed to prefer. As long as Hermione could comfortably curl up on the couch or sprawl on the floor with her children, she was reasonably happy in designer fashions, but jeans would always be her preference.

"So," Draco began as they sipped their wine (non-alcoholic wine in Hermione's case since she was pregnant and careful about these kinds of things), "Tell me about your agenda for the Malfoy family."

"Draco," began Hermione. "I want the kids to begin Hogwarts with alliances in other houses besides their own. I want them to see the wizarding world as a whole, not as 'us against them'. Think how our own stories would have been different if we could have put aside not just blood purity, but also house loyalties."

"You don't want them to be loyal to their own house?"

"Well, of course I do. I mean that I also want them to be accepting of others. And I want them to learn to make friends."

"You do realize that you are training our children to be Hufflepuffs," accused Draco.

Hermione's eyes widened, and she took a breath. "Do you think so?"

To tell the truth, Hermione had been worried about the same thing. Was it normal for children to be so compliant and loving towards one another?

"Actually, I don't really care," Draco surprisingly acknowledged as he looked into her eyes. "Hermione, our children are happy. I am happy. I've never experienced family like this before, and I like it. If they all end up in Hufflepuff, so be it." His grimace made Hermione laugh. Draco's face was disapproving, but his eyes were smiling.

"Really? So we can pursue friendships with Harry's kids?"

“Just one question. Are you sure this is about the kids and not you? Do you miss *your* friends?” Draco’s voice was kind, but now his eyes were shuttered. He was afraid, Hermione realized. Hermione reached for his hand and stroked it lightly to reassure him.

“I do miss them, yes. I miss being Hermione and living her life, but that’s gone for me now. You and the kids are everything to me. I would never have even been able to have children if it hadn’t been for becoming Astoria. Draco, I can be happy without Harry and the Weasleys. I only want to try this if you are okay with it.”

“I’m fine.” Draco’s eyes warmed up as she stroked his hand. “Let’s hear your plan.”

“I see three options. One, we can go through Harry. We can just ask him to set up time for us to meet his children. He can work it out with Ginny. Two, we could go through Andromeda. The children can meet their aunt and then connect with the Potters. Three, Astoria could get to know Molly Weasley. All the Weasley grandchildren end up playing at the Burrow, so it would be the perfect place to meet. I could hire Molly to do daycare one day a week or something like that.”

“I am not ready to handle the Burrow; nor am I ready to throw my children to the weasels so to speak,” replied Draco with distaste. “Let’s try the Harry option first.”

They ordered their food, and Hermione beamed at her husband. The genuine, happy smile looked out of place on Astoria’s regal face, but Draco no longer saw Astoria. When he looked at his wife, he saw Hermione. Astoria had made his life miserable. Hermione had brought joy to his life.

“Do you have more items on your agenda?” inquired Draco as they sampled their dinner. He smirked, “I’m thinking of suggestions for certain conjugal activities for husband and wife to engage in when they return home?”

Hermione blushed, and Draco still loved that about her. He was disappointed when she led the conversation a different direction.

“Draco, I really want to make a difference in the world. You know that about me. If I can’t change it as Hermione Granger, then it will have to be as Astoria Malfoy. What does Astoria Malfoy care most about? Her children, right? So, I want to begin a parenting magazine for witches and wizards. I’ve already thought of a title: *Magical Parenting Today*.”

“And how would that change the world?” Draco raised his brows skeptically.

“Well, magazines are driven by fashion, and I would create new fashions for parents.”

Draco knew his wife. He knew her proclivities. He knew her passions for freedom and equality, not fashion. He knew her hatred for Pureblood traditions. His stomach wrenched, and he began to have a bad taste in his mouth.

“Tell me more.”

“Great.” Hermione enthusiastically sighed. She hadn’t really expected his support in this endeavor and should have tread more carefully, but her glee outweighed her caution.

“Oh, Draco, this is going to be fantastic. It will be a monthly magazine featuring a different wizard family each issue. There will be an advice column for child rearing and preparing for school, *of course* we’ll have a column on children’s books, articles on holiday

celebrations and family vacations. Fashion will sell the magazine, Draco, so it will have clothing fashions, nursery and playroom décor, the latest toys, etc. Flourish and Botts, Weasley's Wizard Wheezes, and A Little Magic, you know, the new children's shop in Diagon Alley? Those businesses will likely want to advertise and sell our magazine in their stores. This magazine will benefit *business*, Draco."

"And?" Draco sipped his wine and waited. His eyes smiled at her glow-from pregnancy? Or was it enthusiasm for her latest project?

"And it will benefit families, Draco. It will help families think about different ways to raise children. It will challenge purebloods to put their children's happiness before their bloodlines. I want to challenge arranged marriages. I want to challenge pureblood superiority. I want to challenge the idea that women should submit to their husbands. It will help Muggleborns to know what the Wizarding world has to offer. And here's the kicker... There will be a column on what the Muggle world has to offer."

"Hermione..."

"Draco, can't you see? The magazine will share all that we have learned together as a family for the last ten years so others can experience the happiness that we have. It's a mission. *Finally*, I get to do something worthwhile."

Draco froze. His eyes narrowed and became cold. He put his fork down and spoke quietly but harshly. "Your job is raising the children. You are doing the most worthwhile work there is. Everyone is happy right now. Nothing else matters. Listen carefully, Hermione: *Forget this project.*"

The light faded out of Hermione's eyes. She withdrew and became the very picture of Astoria.

"You are right, of course. Family is most important." She lowered her eyes from Draco's and began to eat delicately. Her mouth was set in a grim line as she struggled to master her temper and disappointment.

Why did this magical world have to be so far behind the times? Hermione agonized. Muggles got this! They set their women free to pursue their dreams! Muggle women could work, be champions of the underprivileged, and have a family as well. Being a wife of a Pureblood wizard was like living at the turn of the 20th century. Disapproval toward women who wanted to drive, but a few work opportunities for high achieving women. However, wizarding marriage laws... Hermione fumed. Pureblood marriage law was like going back to the Middle Ages.

The Pureblood wife submitted to the husband. Hermione always thought that Draco was different from other Pureblood wizards because their marriage worked so well-*until something like this came up*. She breathed slowly and carefully to control her rage while staring at her plate. A part of her wanted to burst free from her cage. But the other part knew it was a cage she had chosen and would never willingly leave.

Draco immediately missed the warm glowing Hermione. Was he right to squelch her enthusiasm? Did he really think he could keep Hermione Granger tied to Malfoy Manor forever? She was a bundle of energy and enthusiasms, always on the lookout for a cause to support. If she hadn't died ten years ago, Hermione Granger would most likely be the

Minister of Magic today. He sighed, thinking how different everything would be if she hadn't ended up in Astoria's body. No. He did not want to dwell on that possibility. Hermione was his own personal miracle. He had to find some way to work this out.

"Let's take some time out from round one before starting round two. I need to think this over. You are a brave and talented woman, Hermione. I know that whatever you do will be successful. But.."

"There's always a 'but'," grumbled Hermione bitterly under her breath.

"However, I don't believe the wizarding world is ready for this. A magazine like this with your ideas and purpose could be very contentious politically. I can't have my name attached to this, and I don't think it would be safe for our children to have yours attached either."

Hermione spluttered with anger. "Here you go, thinking of *politics, propriety, reputation* and other Slytherin ideals when this is a chance to influence *justice, equality, and education* for *tolerance*. A Gryffindor would say this is a worthy goal no matter the cost to safety or reputation."

"You don't mean that, Hermione. You wouldn't put our children in danger solely because of your idealism."

"I don't believe they would ever be in danger. The world is changing. I just want to help it along."

"You are wrong. The world is not changing. It's growing more dangerous for the Muggleborn. You have been isolated with the children at the Manor the past few years, and you haven't heard the politics at the latest dinner parties. You haven't been to the Ministry of Magic in awhile. Things are different, Hermione. Your idea is a good one, but now is not the time."

"It's just a magazine, for Godric's sake. But, if things are this bad, then all the more reason to fight," replied Hermione with a deadly gleam in her eye. Their voices were quiet, but Hermione was beginning to hiss.

Draco needed to diffuse the situation quickly. "Let's both think about this and talk again later. Now, if you are finished eating, would you like to dance?"

Hermione rose sullenly, but melted into Draco's arms fairly quickly once the music started. He stroked her back, kissed her hair, and frowned at the unsettling fear nagging at him. Everything was perfect right now; Draco did not want to see anything change.

Really, he should have never discouraged Hermione from freeing their house elves.

Chapter Three: Memories

All magical characters, world, and language belong to J.K. Rowling.

Plot comes from cannz.

Chapter Three— Memories

When Draco awoke the next morning, his wife was nestled close to him. He rolled to his side and pulled her even closer, dragging his hand along her body from her breast down to her swelling stomach. He rested his hand protectively over the new baby. Maybe he would feel the baby kick. He marveled at how he loved touching this body now that it was Hermione. When Astoria lived in it, he couldn't stand touching her. He thought about why. Astoria preened in front of the mirror. She used her body to attract attention, to manipulate people. She always presented her best side, which, to tell the truth, were her breasts. She worshiped fashion and had dressed so seductively that the Malfoys had been embarrassed.

Hermione could care less what she looked like or what she was wearing. She was uncomfortable with people who responded to her looks. Her very deep and sincere personality shone through Astoria's skin because she didn't hide herself behind glamour as Astoria had done. Hermione gave herself away and she received love in return. Hermione made this body truly beautiful in Draco's eyes.

Draco never forgot the day he realized that Hermione Granger was alive.

Ten years ago, fed up with Astoria's affairs, Draco had sent her away. His emotions had been raw with anger, despair, and humiliation. But Astoria had promptly gone missing. That wasn't like Astoria; she liked being noticed. She was vindictive and would most likely have remained nearby to cause Draco more pain. Not only was Draco worried; everyone was worried. Foul play was hinted at and Draco, of course, was the prime suspect.

In court, Harry Potter revealed that Astoria had contacted him, that she was safe, and that he had her address. Draco had been stunned. Astoria had claimed that she was really Hermione Granger, but Draco frankly had thought she was crazy. Could it all be true? Astoria had never before had anything to do with Harry Potter. Did she even know him? And why would she go to Harry Potter of all people if she were in trouble? Was Harry Potter her latest conquest?

When Draco and Narcissa arrived at Astoria's flat in Muggle London, Draco knew. This was not Astoria. *This was Hermione Granger.* It screamed at him from every wall even though no one was home. The flat was simple, cheap, plain. Astoria was not simple, cheap or plain. She would never live in a place like this. Draco looked at the couch, the bed, the microwave, the TV. Astoria wouldn't have slept here. She wouldn't have read those Muggle books. She wouldn't have known what a microwave or TV was for. The bathroom had no make-up or beauty products. All Draco saw was a hairbrush, a Muggle toothbrush and

toothpaste. He went to the closet and peeked inside. He was afraid that he would see men's clothing. There weren't very many clothes, but all were women's clothing-Muggle clothing—jeans, skirts, scarves, and t-shirts, very casual and very cheap. These clothes screamed Hermione Granger, not Astoria Malfoy.

Draco had been toying with an electronic gadget when Astoria had unlocked the door and stood in shock at the sight of Narcissa Malfoy sitting on her chair.

"We have properties that you could have lived in." Narcissa had said.

"Yes, I know, thank you, but I wanted a bit more hustle and bustle," Astoria had replied gently.

And Draco knew. This was not Astoria. This was Hermione Granger. Hermione was living on her own in Muggle London without Malfoy money to support her. She was telling them that Astoria didn't need the Malfoys like they needed her.

At first, Draco accused Hermione of murdering Astoria, but under Veritaserum, she revealed that it had been Draco's own wish for Hermione that brought her soul from her own dead body to Astoria's revived body. How that worked, he didn't know. All he knew was that the witch he had indeed wished for was present in his wife's body. It was a miracle, and he'd better not mess this up. A witch he truly admired was part of his life and seemed willing to provide him with an heir.

He thought it would take time to win Hermione over, but she was willing to try marriage with him again. She wanted babies more than anything because she and Ron had never been able to have children, ultimately causing her breakup with Ron. Her life as an infertile Hermione Granger was now over, so now she wanted to make a success of her life as Astoria Malfoy. The primary function of a Malfoy wife was to produce an heir, but Hermione wanted more than one. She wanted a family, a happy family, a family like the Weasleys in the Burrow, and she truly believed she could have it all.

It worked. It really did. Draco loved his wife and family more than anything. She was his miracle from the gods, a second chance at life and happiness. Hermione taught Draco to trust her. Ten years of trust and love had made a happy home. She poured herself into her children and her husband. She taught the children to read and write, to sing and laugh. They went on family vacations to France and Greece and Cornwall. They took trips in Muggle London to the zoo, the cinema, the theater, the symphony, and museums. But the Malfoy family didn't really interact with other families, so Hermione was able to be herself while keeping her true identity a secret.

Draco worried that this would soon change. He did not believe the Wizard world was ready for Hermione Malfoy.

Hermione stirred in her sleep, turning toward her husband, wrapping him in her arms.

Chapter Four: Family

Thanks to J.K. Rowling for creating Harry Potter.

Thanks to camnz for encouraging me to write.

Thanks to all the readers who have reviewed this story!

Chapter Four— Family

“Rise and shine! Grand-maman and Grand-papa are waiting downstairs, so let’s get dressed!” Hermione bustled around the kids rooms, opening the blinds with her wand to groans as the sun hit their eyes. “What sleepyheads you are! You’re usually the first ones up! Reveillez-vous!”

While she waited for the children to come tumbling out of their beds, she spun slowly in the playroom. It was lovely. The morning sun was filtering through the fir trees into the ceiling-high windows that viewed the Malfoy gardens. Hermione had redesigned the place from the dark, dismal nursery it had been when Draco was a child. He had owned every toy a child could desire, magical books, and the latest broomstick, but also had bars on his small nursery windows and a house-elf to raise him. It was a lonely existence. Narcissa did love her son, but basically the Malfoy philosophy was to toughen their son, not coddle him. They had kept Draco hungry for affection and approval so they could control him. Hermione firmly believed in coddling when small, then setting them free when they were older. She vowed to love her children no matter how they turned out, and so far so good; they were simply delightful.

Scorpius and Cassiopeia each had their own tiny rooms (well, tiny for Malfoy Manor) that branched off from the playroom. Orion and Leo shared a larger room. The last bedroom was a sweet nursery that each child had lived in for a time, warm and comfortable, full of stars and twinkling lights. Hermione rubbed her protruding belly. In another month or so, a new baby would rest in this room, well, maybe in three months’ time. Usually, their babies first slept in their parents’ suite. It sometimes made sleeping difficult, but Hermione believed it was essential for bonding.

“Come, Children!” Hermione chanted, “I’m ready to start the day!”

Leo, the four year old, was the first one out, running into her arms and giving his mum a smack on the cheek, but Cassie, the seven year old, was the first one dressed.

“Does this dress look pretty, Mum? Will Grand-maman like it?”

Hermione inspected her daughter’s blue dress and gave her approval. She didn’t usually care what her children wore, but Narcissa certainly did. Next came Orion, his white blond hair mussed. He was such an adorable five year old that Hermione tried to give him a kiss, but he squirmed to get away. She kissed Leo again instead.

“Mummy, I had a dream about flying!” announced Leo.

“Flying on a broom?” asked Orion with interest.

“No, I was flying on my blanket.” Leo held up his favorite blanket.

Orion hooted.

“In the book *One Thousand and One Nights*, Aladdin flies on a magic carpet,” Hermione told the boys. Cassie raised her eyebrows.

“That sounds fun,” Cassie said with a smile at Leo. Orion hooted again.

“Mummy, can you make my blanket fly? Please?” begged Leo.

“We’ll see, Leo. Breakfast and school first. Come on, boys, let me help you get dressed.” Hermione took the boys by hand and led them back to their room to put on their clothes and comb their hair.

“Scorpius! You’d better be up and dressed for breakfast by the time Orion and Leo are done! Make your bed, too! Cassie, if your bed is made, you can read.”

Opposite the floor length window was a small library reaching to the ceiling. A magical ladder enabled the children to reach any book without falling. The bookcases were filled with Muggle children’s books. All of Hermione’s childhood favorites and even some newer releases made it into the library, but not many magical children’s books were included. Of course, *The Tale of Beedle the Bard* was there, but most of the wizard classics were too dark for Hermione’s tastes, darker than Grimm, and the more recent popular wizard children’s books were too badly written.

Wizards could learn a lot from Muggles if they were a little less prejudiced. How sad that most magical children had never heard of Beatrix Potter, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Roald Dahl, or C.S. Lewis! The Malfoy children would cherish treasures like *Wind in the Willows*, *Peter Pan*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. Hermione had charmed the Muggle books so the illustrations came to life for a moment after the page was finished. It was a charm she intended to share with the readers of her parenting magazine.

When Hermione came out of the boys’ room with Orion and Leo, she found Scorpius and Cassie seated with a book. Hermione’s heart burst with pride at her two oldest children reading together. She loved that her children were companions for one another.

“Children, I’m leaving today for awhile. I’m visiting Harry Potter. So after breakfast, I want you to work on your lessons until 11:00; then you can play. Daddy will be at work, but you can ask Penny or Scorpius or Grand-maman for help if you need it.”

“Mummy, can my lesson be art today?” asked Cassie. “I have new watercolors to try.”

“Mum, can my lesson be wizard chess?” asked Scorpius. “I could play a game with Grand-papa.”

“Mummy, can my lesson be reading?” asked Orion. “I can read to Leo.”

“Mummy, can my lesson be reading?” asked Leo. “I want Orion to read *Aladdin* to me.”

Hermione chuckled. “That may be a book I read to you, Leo. I’ll leave a list of schoolwork and chores for each of you to check off. When you finish the list, you can choose what you

want to do next.”

She organized a few math, penmanship, and reading materials for the children on their school desks, gave Scorpius extra Muggle history to read, made sure that their quills (and pencils for the little ones) were sharp, then dashed down the stairs with the children for breakfast. After her visit with Harry, she would do either an art project, science experiment, or cooking lesson with her little class. Cooking in the kitchen was the best introduction to potions, she believed. Also, it was practical in case they ever needed to cook without elves, although she would never mention that to the house elves. It upset them.

“Mummy, don’t forget that today the music tutor is coming. We have French today with Grand-maman too.” Cassie reminded her as they entered the Malfoy dining room.

“Right. Grand-maman can give you your French lesson while I am gone. I should be back before the music tutor arrives, but if I’m not, what should you do to make him feel welcome?”

“Shake his hand and welcome him to the Manor,” responded Scorpius.

“Sit quietly and pay attention,” added Orion.

“Try our best,” suggested Cassie.

“Smile,” grinned Leo.

“Excellent. You will be fine. Though maybe we should practice the music lesson once more before I leave,” Hermione worried.

“Good morning, Astoria. Bonjour, mes enfants,” greeted Narcissa calmly from the table.

“Bonjour, Grand-maman!” chimed the children, running to kiss their grandparents. “Bonjour, Grand-papa!”

“Come here and give me a kiss, too,” demanded Draco as he put down the *Daily Prophet*.

All four children lined up before their father for their hug and kiss. Draco waited expectantly for Hermione’s kiss. She laughed and kissed him on the cheek. He pulled her down into the chair beside him and placed a kiss on her neck.

After finishing her croissant and strawberries, Hermione announced, “Today I have an appointment at the Ministry of Magic.”

“With Harry Potter!” added Orion.

Lucius frowned. *Why would Astoria visit Harry Potter?*

“Is that *necessary*?” Lucius inquired with disdain.

“Yes, is that *necessary*?” Draco echoed with a smirk.

Hermione swatted Draco. Draco scowled. Lucius narrowed his eyes. Scorpius gazed from mother to father to grandfather. Hermione ignored the question Lucius had asked.

“I will be happy to watch the children finish their school work, Astoria, before our French lesson,” proposed Narcissa graciously after a minute of silence.

“Thank you, Narcissa. That would be wonderful.” Astoria looked warmly into her mother-in-laws eyes. “I’ll be back after lunch, maybe sooner.”

“Why don’t you stop by the office and have lunch with me?” Draco suggested with a frown. He was curious about the outcome of this visit, but tried to act unconcerned.

Hermione beamed and agreed. A much-needed visit with Harry, a date with Draco, a music lesson with Maestro Michel-this was going to be a fantastic day.

Chapter Five: Harry

Thanks to J.K. Rowling for creating Harry Potter.

Thanks to camnz for encouraging me to write.

Thanks to all the readers who have reviewed this story!

Chapter Five— Harry

“Hermione, this is not going to work. I can’t do this for you,” Harry took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Hermione sat in the chair opposite Harry, dumbfounded.

“What do you mean? Why can’t it work? I’m just talking about our children getting to know each other before Hogwarts. What is wrong with that?”

“Nothing is wrong with it. It’s a fine idea, but in the situation I’m in right now, it won’t work. I can’t do this.”

“Do what? Talk to Ginny? Set up a playdate? What on earth do you mean?”

Harry sighed. “Ten years ago, when you were in Muggle London, there was a trial. Who came forward to save Draco Malfoy from the accusation that he had murdered his wife? Me. Who knew your address? I did. Who checks in with you once or twice a year? Me. My interest in Astoria Malfoy has been questioned. I need to maintain my distance, not make a habit of seeing you and your family.”

“Bullocks! This is BULLOCKS! You can’t let me down! HARRY! You can’t let my children down! I don’t believe this!” Hermione’s temper was scorching, but she also felt tears threatening to surface. “This is a chance for the future of our children, Harry. They could become friends and you won’t let that happen because you are *afraid* of what people think? *Draco’s* not afraid of this. Why are *you*?”

She was being rejected by her friend, once her best friend. And the Malfoy children were being rejected by Harry Potter. No way. No way was she leaving this room without a fight.

“I have never asked you for anything, Harry,” she continued fiercely. “When all this happened to me, I didn’t ask you for any help. I’ve stayed under the radar. This is the first time I’ve asked for something *very* important to me. And this is not hard. This is about the children. You *can* do this, Harry.”

“Hermione, you know that I would do anything for you. But I can’t do anything for Astoria Malfoy.”

“Why? What’s wrong with Astoria? Who won’t let you? Is it the Weasleys? Who?”

“No. Molly and Arthur love all children, and they would love Astoria’s children too.”

“Tell me. Who won’t allow this?”

Harry sighed again. "It's Ginny. She's noticed you. She notices every time we meet. She sees your smile when you see me. She knows that we talk as if we have a history together. She knows that you hug me. Why would Astoria Malfoy hug Harry Potter unless they are having an affair or something?"

Hermione looked as if she had been slapped. Her fierceness dropped away, and her lips trembled.

"Ginny is jealous of Astoria?" Hermione quavered. Astoria had lived an upright life for ten years. Astoria had been faithful to her husband and had been devoted to her kids. Astoria had only seen Harry Potter twelve times in the last ten years.

"She won't allow me to spend time with you, and she won't permit our children to spend time together either. She does not like the Malfoy family."

"She doesn't *know* the Malfoy family. Should we tell her who I really am? Should we tell her why I want our children to know each other?" Hermione felt broken. She buried her hands in her face to hide the tears that were flowing freely now. This was so important. There had to be a way.

"There is no way she would believe this story, Hermione. Astoria Malfoy is really Hermione Granger? She knows I miss you tremendously, and she would probably think that I have lost my marbles."

"Shouldn't we give her the benefit of the doubt and try the truth anyway?" Hermione begged.

"I'm going to lay it all on the line for you, Hermione. Things are bad right now at the Ministry. My job is not secure. If I do anything that calls my sanity into question, then my job will be gone. There are wizards circling me like vultures just waiting for me to make a mistake or do something crazy."

Hermione stared in disbelief. This was Harry Potter? Worried about job security?

"Okay." She sniffed and rose to leave. "If you think of any way we can introduce our children to each other without either you or me being involved, let me know. If I think of a way, I hope you will support me."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. "You have my word. I would *love* for our children to get to know each other if I were not involved in any way."

"Thank you, Harry." She turned to give Harry a good-bye hug and sniffed once more.

Just then the door burst open with a bang by a furious Ginny Potter.

Chapter Six: Draco

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Kudos belong to camnz.

Chapter Six— Draco

“How did it go?” asked Draco, glancing up from some parchments he’d been studying. Hermione promptly burst into tears. Draco rose from his chair in alarm and circled the desk. He drew her close and brushed her hair out of eyes. *Really, did Hermione ever brush her hair? Why was it in her eyes again?* Hermione gave a sob and buried her head in Draco’s shoulder. He rubbed her back and waited. In a few moments, Hermione was calm. She sniffed.

“Harry said no. Can you believe it? He’s worried what people may think. Specifically, Ginny. She’s jealous of Astoria. Not only that...” Hermione bit back another sob, “...when I hugged Harry good-bye, Ginny opened the door. She was furious. She thinks I’m having an affair with Harry.”

Draco’s hand stilled. His eyes closed in horror. Gryffindors were notorious for being affectionate, but Astoria was not a Gryffindor, so she should not have been hugging anyone other than her husband. The last time Draco caught Astoria in the arms of another man, he banished her from Malfoy Manor. That was the time she disappeared for six months in Muggle London.

Hermione’s mouth trembled, and she sniffed again. Draco thought of her disappointment and began to get angry.

“What do you mean he said no? He doesn’t want our children to know each other? Are the Malfoys not good enough for the Potters? Wait till I get my hands on that little...”

Draco called in his secretary, Mrs. Gray, to tend to Hermione and apparated to the Ministry. Hermione drank some tea, let Mrs. Gray fuss a bit, then jumped to her feet. What if Draco were to duel Harry or Ginny? He might need a backup! She quickly apparated back to the Ministry and ran to Harry’s office, wand in hand.

She opened Harry’s office door to raised voices.

“Just keep her away from my husband!” shrieked Ginny at Draco.

“She didn’t do anything wrong,” bit out Draco. “All she bloody wanted was to get the kids together to play. Can you get that through your thick skull, Weaselette? She wants inter-house unity at Hogwarts, so she’s starting in preschool. She does not want your husband.”

“Right,” sneered Ginny, “Everyone knows Astoria Malfoy’s reputation. What man hasn’t she chased? I can’t believe she’s pulled the wool over your eyes, but she hasn’t pulled it over

mine. She wants men. She wants my man. She wants Harry.”

“You don’t *know* my wife, Ginny Potter. You have no idea what she wants. She doesn’t have time to chase men. She keeps me very busy in my bed. She devotes every minute of her day to our four, almost five children, who, by the way, all look like me, so I *know* she is not messing around.” Draco’s face hardened with icy sarcasm as he threw a disgusted look at Harry, “Astoria wants our children to be friends. Did you hear that, Potter? *Friends*? Mean anything to you? Hilarious, isn’t it? Who in their right minds would want to be *friends* with the Potters? Not me.”

“Who would want to be *friends* with the Malfoys? Especially when *she* can’t seem to keep her hands to herself!” Ginny yelled furiously, noticing Astoria in the doorway. Draco ignored her and spoke to Harry.

“I supported Astoria because I respect her ideas, but maybe she was wrong this time. As far as I’m concerned, you two have both blown it. An olive branch was extended to you, to the Potter family from the Malfoys, and *you rejected it.*”

Ginny began to look self conscious and perhaps a bit ashamed of her outburst. Harry looked miserable and shifted uncomfortably.

“Um, Malfoy?” he began, but Draco cut him off and looked at Ginny.

“Get over your bloody suspicion and jealousy.”

Draco turned on his heel, grabbed Hermione’s hand, and side-apparated them both to Mi Casa for lunch. They found a private booth in the corner. Hermione collapsed onto the bench, laughing.

Draco stared at her in disbelief.

“Are you *laughing*? Is this hysterics or something?”

“No, I’m fine. It’s just...” Hermione giggled, “You told Harry that I don’t have time to chase men because I keep you busy in bed. That’s so funny!”

Draco looked stumped. “Why is that funny?”

“I don’t know, it just is. Then... I don’t have time to chase men because I chase my four going on five children who look like you.” Hermione dissolved into hysterical laughter. Draco vaguely wondered if she should be slapped.

“Then you said, ‘Who in their right minds would want to be friends with the Potters?’ That is so funny!” Hermione calmed down, but still kept smiling. Her eyes were shining as she grinned at Draco. “Because actually, Draco, *everyone* wants to be friends with the Potters.” Every now and then she chuckled, and after awhile Draco reluctantly smiled too.

“Draco,” whispered Hermione. He leaned in to hear what she had to say. ‘Draco, what if Number 5 doesn’t look like you?’ she breathed with a glint in her eye. “Will I be in trouble?”

Draco’s lips twisted wryly. That was funny. He had no doubts about his wife’s fidelity. He trusted her integrity and loyalty because, well, because she was Hermione Granger. They were lucky, very lucky to have a marriage based on trust. They were apparently more fortunate in their relationship than the Potters.

“No, you won’t be in trouble,” he murmured back, “but if that’s the case, maybe we’ll have to try for number six.”

After lunch, Draco gave Hermione a genuine smile. They were rare, and Hermione beamed back at him, her tears forgotten. He was so darn beautiful when he smiled.

“Draco, you told Harry that you respect my ideas. You do? Really?” Hermione glowed.

“You are amazing, you know,” he told Hermione quietly. “Not many people would be able to laugh at that fiasco today. I don’t know anyone able to forgive the wrongs done to them and then adapt to another person’s life like you have done.”

Hermione smiled softly. “The circumstances that triggered those wrongs are gone with the past. We’re building the future, Draco. It wasn’t so hard to adapt to Astoria’s life since I wanted a family, too.”

“You wanted a family. I wanted an heir. Bit of a difference there. You are a wise woman, Hermione.”

Hermione gazed deeply into his eyes, losing herself in the warmth she found there.

“So,” he continued, ‘if this friendship thing is not going to work out with Potter, why not try friendships with some others? We have isolated ourselves,’ he admitted. “You, in particular, should have girl friends and should get out more. Your sister Daphne has a son a little older than Scorpius. How about Blaise and his wife? They have a son Orion’s age.”

Hermione gave a shudder at the mention of Daphne and Blaise. Daphne had not proven to be the friendliest sister. Blaise gave her the creeps with his come-hither smiles toward Astoria. She actually knew his wife better, but wasn’t really interested in pursuing a close friendship with her.

“It’s a good idea, Draco, but I haven’t given up on the Potters yet.”

“You want that crazy redheaded woman around our children?”

“She’s not usually that way, Draco. She’ll calm down. Ginny will be fine around the kids, really.”

“I can’t imagine her softening toward... us.”

“Maybe not. Since it didn’t work out this time, I’m going to try option number three. I’m going to interview Mrs. Weasley for the magazine this week.”

Draco choked on his drink. “*Mrs. Weasley? Magazine?*”

“Yes, I’d like to get a mock-up, well, maybe I should just produce a sample issue, so you can see it for yourself. We can test the waters with a few Pureblood, Halfblood, and Muggleborn families. What do you think?”

“Hermione, this is a bad idea, a dangerous idea.”

“You can’t know that until you see it, Draco. It’s going to be fantastic.”

“Hermione, you’re a genius. I believe that you can create a masterpiece, but I know politics. I know that it will come with a price, one that I am not willing to pay. Please,

Hermione, drop it.”

“Draco, love, you live in fear. I want our children to be free to live their lives as they see fit, not as society dictates. I want them to live for justice and truth and compassion. How can *they* have that future if *I* can’t? Me, Astoria Malfoy, pureblood witch from one of the most elite, powerful wizarding families, can’t launch a simple journalistic venture?”

“I don’t want our children harmed by your crusade.”

“They’ll be fine. This magazine is actually a very small concept, Draco. It’s about children and fashion, and it will have a lot of perspectives besides my own, I promise. Remember, you respect my ideas, Draco,” Hermione reminded him with a teasing smile.

Draco sighed. He hated this magazine concept. It seemed low class and revolutionary. To him the choice between his wife’s idealism and his children’s safety seemed clear. He should protect the family name and oppose his wife.

But he adored Hermione, who had a genuine concern for humanity. He didn’t want to destroy the very thing he loved about her, did he?

“Let’s keep it small, then. Show me one sample issue. I’m not committing, Hermione. I don’t want the Malfoy name on it. Please use a pseudonym to protect our privacy.”

Hermione smiled vaguely, “Of course. Thank you, Draco. I’d better get back to the Manor for the music lesson. Then I’m going to send Molly Weasley an owl.”

“Oh, no,” groaned Draco, “not more Weasleys, on top of everything else.”

“It’s all intertwined,” Hermione assured Draco, “and it’s all good.”

Chapter Seven: The Burrow

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All nods acknowledge camnz.

Chapter Seven— The Burrow

Before Hermione left for her appointment with Molly at the Burrow, she stopped by Narcissa's sitting room.

"I am going out for an hour, Narcissa. Penny is watching the children play upstairs, but I wanted you to know I'm gone in case they need anything."

"That's fine, Astoria. I will bring Cassiopeia down to spend time with me if you wish. She can join me for tea."

"She'll love that," Hermione replied warmly. She looked hesitantly at Draco's mother, "Narcissa, what was Draco like as a small child?"

Narcissa smiled, "I've told you before, Astoria, that Draco was the perfect child. He never misbehaved and always did exactly what his mother and father required of him. Draco has made me very happy. And so have you, Astoria."

Hermione beamed and crossed the room to give Narcissa an awkward hug. She had heard before that Draco had been the perfect child, but now something clicked. Perhaps he too had been a compliant child. Perhaps her well-behaved, loving children *were* typical Malfoys. Perhaps they could learn about spunk from the Weasleys.

Hermione waved good-bye to Narcissa, stepped to the fireplace in the outer hall, threw some floo powder in and called out, "The Burrow."

Hermione stepped out of the fireplace and into the Burrow's warm, busy kitchen. Her eyes teared up a bit at the sight of the dishes washing themselves in the sink, the tea kettle chirping and the spoon stirring something hot on the stove. Knitting needles clacked as a Weasley sweater slowly appeared above the moving rocking chair. It had been ten years since Hermione had entered Mrs. Weasley's kitchen.

"Mrs. Weasley?" called Hermione. "Are you home? Hello?"

Molly Weasley came bustling into the kitchen with a self-conscious smile.

"Mrs. Malfoy, how nice of you to call. Come sit down at the table. Can I get you anything? Tea? Pumpkin bread?"

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Weasley, I would love some." Hermione gazed at Molly. Molly was older, grayer, more plump, she thought. She must be in her late 60's now, Hermione surmised.

Would she be up to handling the Malfoy children? Hermione's plan hinged on her children being dropped off to play at the Burrow with Molly Weasley's grandchildren.

Molly sliced some freshly baked bread and chatted nervously to Astoria as she made the tea.

"Do you know, we've never entertained a Malfoy at the Burrow before. It's nothing like the Manor, I know, but it's cozy and it's home."

"It's lovely here." Hermione assured her. There was an awkward silence as Molly looked questioningly at Hermione. *Why have you come?* was her unspoken question.

"Well," said Astoria briskly (Hermione must remember that she was Astoria who did not know Molly at all), "I am planning to launch a new magazine called *Magical Parenting Today*, and your name was given to me as a potential expert for an advice column for parents."

"Oh." Molly looked embarrassed... and flattered. "Oh, I don't know. I'm not much of an expert at raising children. I really don't have any answers for people. And I'm not much of a writer. I don't think I'm the one you want, Mrs. Malfoy. How about someone younger and more up to date?"

"We actually do want someone experienced with children of various ages and stages of life. Since Wizarding families tend to have only one child, the wizard population has declined since the last war. Some of our readers may be interested in having a larger family, so we are looking for someone experienced in managing a large family. Can you tell me more about yourself, Mrs. Weasley?"

"Oh, well, I've raised seven children, but only six are alive today. We lost Fred during the Battle of Hogwarts, you know."

Hermione did know and expressed her sympathy.

"Bill, the eldest, lives in France with his wife Fleur. He works for Gringotts in France. Their daughter just finished school and is working for a children's clothing designer now. Charlie works in Romania with dragons. He never married. Percy and his wife have two children, but we don't see them too often, they spend more time with their other grandparents; Percy works for the Ministry, you know."

Hermione did know and nodded her head.

"Then George. George married Angelina. They have twin sons at Hogwarts, both in Gryffindor. They plan to take over the family business, you know, Weasley's Wizardly Wheezes.

Hermione did know and smiled for Molly to go on.

"Ron married a lovely girl, Annie. They have three children now and come to visit us a few times a week. Then Ginny, my baby girl, married Harry Potter, you know."

Hermione did know and managed to hold back her snort.

"They have three children as well. So, every now and then the Burrow is overflowing with children, but right now it's pretty quiet."

“Well, Mrs. Weasley, you should be proud of a job well done. Every child you’ve raised is a productive member of society. I’m sure they all treasure and appreciate you.”

“It wasn’t much, Mrs. Malfoy, believe me. I just tried to give them love and prevent them from killing each other. It didn’t work for Fred, I’m afraid.”

Hermione’s eyebrows rose in horror. That’s all she did? Surely, she knew that she was the matriarch of the family, the one who held everyone together.

Surely, she knew that she was gifted when it came to assessing her children and knowing what they needed most.

Surely, she knew that her family was special, unlike any other Hermione had ever met.

And it sounded as if Molly was still blaming herself for Fred’s death, twenty years later! Hermione wanted to envelop Molly in a hug to her for all she had done for Hermione, but she restrained herself, remembering that she was Astoria.

“Well, I am satisfied with your credentials, Mrs. Weasley. I think you would be perfect for the job. It will be a paid position, of course. And you won’t need to worry about writing the column; someone on staff will go over your assessments and then write up your advice.”

Molly looked startled. Had she ever been paid for work before? *Well, it was about time*, Hermione thought. Molly frowned and looked doubtful.

“I believe this will work out fine,” Hermione reassured her. “And now I have another request to make. I am pregnant, you know, with my fifth...”

“No, I didn’t know...” breathed Molly with widened eyes. “You look fabulous. I know I didn’t look so glamorous after five children.”

Hermione felt uncomfortable. “Yes, well, I must say that I am very tired (*liar!*), and I could use some help with my children (*liar!*). I was wondering if you had any time on Mondays or Fridays to take my children for me?” *How very Slytherin of you, my dear*, Draco would say. Except that he wouldn’t be likely to send his children to play at the Burrow.

Molly swallowed and eyed Astoria suspiciously. Why would a Malfoy trust a Weasley with her children? Even if she had a good reputation, it would never happen. What if something were to happen to the children left in her care? It could mean instant death or even Azkaban for her. No, it would never work. Not a chance.

“I’m flattered that you asked, Mrs. Malfoy... but I have to say no. I only watch my grandchildren. Something could happen, you know, that was out of my control, and I would worry too much about the safety of your children.” *And my own safety*, she added in her head.

The issue of safety hadn’t crossed Hermione’s mind. She remembered the Burrow as a place of refuge and trusted Molly to care for her children as her own, but actually Molly was right. When Hermione had lived at the Burrow, there had been very little supervision and quite a bit of mischief, especially when the twins were around. Draco would want a say in this, she thought.

“I see,” replied Astoria with a shade of disappointment. “Well, thank you so much for your time, Mrs. Weasley. It was lovely meeting you in your home. I will get back to you about the advice column when we get closer to beginning our first issue.”

Astoria rose regally from her seat at the table, gave her hand to Mrs. Weasley, and stepped into the fireplace to floo home.

The clock moved, and Molly gasped to see Hermione Granger's hand on the clock face—*Hermione Granger who had been dead ten years*— move from *Home* to *Away*.

Chapter Eight: The Granger Home

All rights belong to J.K. Rowling and thanks to camnz. I appreciate every review! You are so positive. I'm glad readers recognized the reference to the Weasley clock. Thanks for pointing out an error in the last chapter. I fixed it right away.

Chapter Eight— The Granger Home

"Where are we going today, Mummy?" asked Cassie.

"Can we go to the zoo?" begged Orion.

"Yes, the zoo!" yelled Leo.

Scorpius rolled his eyes and waited by the fireplace ready to floo when the family was ready. Hermione stepped carefully downstairs and checked each of the children. This would likely be their last family day together before the baby was born. To tell the truth, she always felt a bit flustered on these trips. Knowing that Draco disapproved of the Muggle world added to her stress. If anything at all went wrong on the trip, he might put an end to their adventures. She compensated by becoming ultra-organized, a bit bossy, and excessively cheerful.

"Coats? Hats? Gloves? It might be chilly in London today. Scorpius, we are not wearing robes; please change."

Scorpius unfastened his robe to reveal Muggle jeans and a t-shirt underneath.

"Right, I suppose that works. You do need a coat. Let me check my bag to be sure I have everything." Hermione peered into her extendable bag with her wand lit inside. There was a good deal of shuffling before she announced, "I'm ready to go. Where's Papa?"

"Papa!" shrieked Leo as he ran to his father. Draco picked up the four year old and held out his hand to Orion.

"Let's see what Mummy has in store for us today!" said Draco grimly. To tell the truth, he rather enjoyed these expeditions into Muggle London, but hid it carefully.

The family flooed to the Leaky Cauldron, and then stepped outside the door to the cold, bustling Muggle London streets. Scorpius took off his wizard's robes and pulled on his jumper. Hermione pulled out four small backpacks out of her tiny extendable bag. Each bag contained water, a snack, a cell phone, and contact information. She checked all the phones.

"Now, you are ready to go. Stay with Mummy and Papa, but if you do get lost, call us on the phone. Everyone check your phone and make sure you know what buttons to press. Practice now!"

When all was organized, they walked to the tube and found the one that would take them to the suburbs. Today they were going to Hermione Granger's house to play.

Hermione had found her old home for sale on the internet. She asked Draco to buy it for her. When he balked, she practiced what she thought were Slytherin tools of manipulation.

1. Fear: *You know, Draco, this house could be a safehouse in case of emergencies. The Wizarding world is a dangerous place, and no one who knows the Malfoys would ever think to look for Malfoy children in Hermione Granger's old house in a Muggle suburb. Remember how long it took for you to find Astoria in Muggle London?*

2. Practicality: *We could use this house to practice living in the Muggle world. I could teach the children to cook in my old kitchen! It will give us a home base or a place to rest when we get tired of sightseeing.*

3. Pride: *It's okay, Draco, if you can't afford it. I don't need such an expensive present.*

4. Sex: *This could be a getaway for you and me, Draco. Think of all the fun we could have in a home away from home. You could sleep with me in Hermione's old bedroom, Draco.*

Eventually, Draco agreed, although Hermione was secretly surprised. The property wasn't an important asset. Maybe Draco realized that Hermione needed this one connection to her past.

They took the bus to the Granger home. Painted white with gleaming windows, it was large for a Muggle middle class home, but not pretentious. Draco looked unimpressed, but Hermione was bouncing in excitement. Scorpius eyed the trees; they might work well for hiding, climbing, or building a tree house. Everyone got a chance to unlock the door with the key, even Draco.

When they stepped in, it was a bit unlike the home Hermione had grown up in because after all, it had been twelve years since her parents had passed away. Hermione had arranged for it to be updated and furnished comfortably. She led the six Malfoys to the family room and showed them how to start a fire in the small fireplace, too small to use as a floo. While Hermione made popcorn in the microwave, the kids and Draco chased each other all over the house, investigating. The family played with the light switches in every room. Hermione showed her family how to turn on the furnace. Eventually, everyone sprawled on the couch, floor and comfy armchairs laughing away at a movie playing on the TV: *The Incredibles*.

"Muggles certainly do have vivid imaginations," Draco murmured in her ear. "I like the banter and wit, but do you think all this arguing is good for the kids to see?"

"It'll be okay, I promise." Hermione whispered back.

"Mummy, are these people wizards? Is this magic?" asked Cassie.

"Well, technically, they are superheroes, so no, they don't really have magic, just special powers," replied Hermione. Then, "Shh! Listen!"

After the movie finished, Hermione cheered, "Time to make dinner!" Draco looked up in horror, but Hermione grabbed his hand and led him to the kitchen. The children followed. "No elves, no magic, so everyone has to help!"

She had Leo set the table, Orion butter the French bread, and Cassie shred the lettuce for the salad. She showed them how to turn on the stove, then put Scorpius to work frying the sausage. Draco helped Hermione prepare the spaghetti sauce. They cooked the spaghetti and chopped veggies for the salad. Cassie grated Parmesan cheese and searched the fridge for drinks.

“See?” Hermione teased Draco, “He who excels at potions can excel at cooking.”

As the family sat down to eat, Scorpius asked which super hero each person liked and what special power they wished they had. Hermione was impressed with the question and listened intently to their answers. It seemed that the Muggle movie had captured her family’s imagination. Everyone had something to share.

“If I had Violet’s superpower, I wouldn’t ever need an invisibility cloak. Being invisible is the best superpower.”

“Harry Potter had an invisibility cloak,” Hermione contributed to the conversation.

“Ha! So that’s how he got away with so much!” Draco and Scorpius both looked interested in hearing more, but Cassie intervened.

“Mummy, can you make me an invisibility cloak so I can pretend I’m Violet?”

“I want to be Frozone! He’s so amazing!” shouted Orion.

“Use a quiet voice at the table, Orion,” Hermione said somewhat sternly.

“Can our family have superhero suits?” Leo asked. Draco snorted and Hermione giggled.

“I like the wife’s flexibility,” murmured Draco to his wife.

Hermione nodded with innocent eyes and agreed, “Me too. Perfect for motherhood.”

She recalled Harry’s boneless arm experience when Lockhardt had tried to heal his broken arm and wondered if being stretchy was similar. Draco and Scorpius began a deep discussion about flying without brooms.

Washing dishes is fun if you’ve never done it before. The floor and counters were soaked by the time they finished, but the dishes were clean and put away.

“What do we do now?” the children asked Hermione. Draco checked the time and looked like he wanted to leave. *Maybe he wasn’t having fun*, Hermione worried.

“We could leave now...” Hermione began, “...or we could have a... DANCE PARTY!”

She dashed to the ipod in the living room and turned on loud music. The speakers boomed. Then she grabbed the children’s hands and began dancing wildly with them. Draco had to laugh. Crazy dancing made his children happy. His beautiful, pregnant wife looked ridiculous shaking her booty with the children. He was very glad that his parents weren’t here to see this. Hermione pulled Draco onto the “dance floor” with her, and Draco obligingly moved to the beat. Muggle music was... interesting, to say the least.

The truth of the matter was... Draco had seen right through Hermione’s rather unexceptional attempts to use Slytherin manipulation. He had intended to give her this home from the first. Knowing that Hermione could at any time completely disappear into the Muggle world *with his children in tow* scared him to death. This home provided a safe connection to both worlds, kept Hermione happy, and relieved some of Draco’s fears for his family.

“Hermione,” Draco began that night in the privacy of their suite back at the Manor. As they slipped between their silk sheets, he kissed his wife deeply and pulled her close. She

snuggled in and stroked his cheek and white blond hair, so grateful to him for letting her share the Muggle world with their children.

“Hmm?”

“Do you like your new house?”

“You mean my old house? Yes, thank you, Draco, I do. When I became Astoria, losing Hermione’s flat was one of the hardest things for me. I couldn’t get in because I wasn’t Hermione anymore. And then all my books and clothes and treasures were packed up or given away, I suppose. I don’t know what happened to my cat. Malfoy Manor didn’t feel like home to me, and I felt lost at sea, like an unmoored vessel.”

“How about now?”

“The Manor is very much home now. I bloom where I’m planted, and my roots are sinking in, growing deeper every day. Did you like my Muggle house today, Draco?”

“Mmm. You don’t have to try so hard, Hermione. You don’t have to prove anything to me.”

“I don’t? But Draco, you don’t really like the Muggle world.”

“No, but I trust you, and I want you to share your world with us. I wonder though, don’t Muggles lead quiet lives too? Is everything about entertainment with them?”

Hermione blinked as the truth hit home. To date, every visit they had made to the Muggle world had indeed involved entertainment. Muggles did enjoy more entertainment-based technology than Wizards. Perhaps she had better rethink her ideas for Christmas presents.

“Draco,” she breathed. “I need to consider this. You may be right. Am I spoiling our children? Not with toys, but with entertainment?”

“Not at all,” Draco reassured her. “Tonight was fun. And the pleasures were simple. I liked it. We could just go to the Grangers’ home and have a quiet weekend together without getting all feverish about having fun.”

“Ah, I get it. We can visit the Muggles as long as we are proper Malfoys with proper manners. Is that it?” Hermione teased him. “And I bet you want to bring some house-elves along too, right?”

Draco smiled sheepishly. “House-elves would be nice.”

“NEVER!” squealed Hermione as she very *improperly* attacked her husband.

Chapter Nine: Hermione's Return

J.K. Rowling gets the credit for birthing a wonderful world.

Camnz gets the credit for the fascinating prequel.

Reviewers get the credit for leading me to reorganize a difficult chapter.

Chapter Nine— Hermione's Return

Hermione had a brain that worked overtime. She had been planning *Magical Parenting Today* for months; the first three issues were basically written. She had a team. Next on her agenda was to find a photographer who could capture life as well as fashion. She intended her magazine to be about real people, not perfect people.

The photo shoots of the Malfoy children showed a charming Leo who was dwarfed by a sullen Orion. Cassie was gorgeous, but she produced fake smiles and moved her head from side to side as she posed and preened for the camera-like *Astoria would have? Oh gods, no.* White haired Scorpius glared like a smaller version of his father. Hermione's eyebrows rose as she examined Scorpius' sneer in the picture. It was the very image of the snobbish annoying prat she remembered from Hogwarts! *Oh, dear. Will others write off her son like she had Draco during their school years? Friendships must be established soon,* she thought to herself.

Jane Creevey's proofs brought a smile to her lips. *Brilliant.* Jane had captured the Malfoy white blond hair. It glistened. Some of the children's eyes flashed gray as they glanced at the camera. *There* was her sweet boy Scorpius conversing wryly with a more natural looking Cassie who luckily, seemed unaware that the camera had caught her brief chuckle and the swing of her silvery blond curtain of hair. Orion and Leo were lively, jumping, grinning, wrestling on the floor. And Jane had caught a look on Draco's face that Hermione didn't think she had ever seen before. As Draco stood behind Astoria, he breathed into her hair and closed his eyes. He looked serious and vulnerable.

My husband is a very sweet, loving man, Hermione thought. She had known it, of course, but this precious magical moving photograph was proof.

Jane Creevey was hired.

Her right hand woman was a Muggle born journalist named Anna McGuire who loved Wizard and Muggle fashion. She was bubbly, enthusiastic, and internet savy, which was necessary for keeping up with Muggle fashions. After all, why re-invent the wheel? She recommended her Hogwarts schoolmate Roy Thomas as graphic designer. If the venture took off, several more journalists would need to be added to the staff; Anna knew a few.

Gloria Van Duzen was another obvious choice. She had experience working for *Witch Weekly*. Gloria knew the business and could get *Magical Parenting Today* printed, on the stands, in the stores. She had important Slytherin connections to pureblood families, but didn't seem opposed to the idea of introducing a bit of Muggle culture into the magazine.

Hermione thought she would be a decent sounding board, a representative of traditional wizarding values.

One small problem: Her team was young; none besides Hermione (and Molly) were actually parents. Maybe Draco's secretary, Mrs. Gray could help out. She was retiring soon and could be a valuable source for working mothers and grandmothers. Hermione would give Mrs. Gray a floo call.

Hermione tried to imagine toting her baby to the *MPT* office and nursing her infant during team meetings. It sounded doable, but the wheels needed to be set in motion for independence in case she needed more time at home. She hoped the team would become self-sufficient, able to produce the magazine without her if necessary.

Astoria presented her team with the outline and articles for the first three issues.

"I'd like to see a column from healers at St. Mungo's. I think parents would be interested in hearing from the experts." Anna mentioned to Astoria and Gloria.

"We could substitute the Muggle articles with a couple of articles by healers and move the Muggle articles to the next two issues," Gloria suggested. "That way we can keep the Muggle influence small for the first issue, so we don't scare off our readers."

Hermione agreed, "Draco will like that idea. He also wants me to use a pseudonym to protect our family's privacy."

"Really? I think the Malfoy name will be a draw for the magazine. Your family is mysterious, and readers will want to know more about you. Malfoy popularity will drive up sales."

Hermione snorted, "Notoriety, more likely. No, seriously, the Malfoy name will not be available. I'll think up a pen name."

Astoria was honest with her team about her vision for *Magical Parenting Today*. *Number One*: Educate parents and help children. *Number Two*: Lay the groundwork for building a more tolerant society, specifically toward Muggleborns. *Number Three*: Empower women by subtly questioning *some* traditions.

Everyone took copious notes.

Dear Molly,

Should I leave my children home alone with a house-elf? My husband had a house-elf for a nanny, so I know they are capable. What do you think?

Uncertain Mum

Molly Weasley lifted her gaze to the window.

"I don't think I'm qualified to answer this question," she murmured.

"Of course, you are," encouraged Hermione. "What would you tell your children if they asked? What would you tell Harry and Ginny?"

“Oh, that’s different. No, I would never recommend leaving a Weasley child with a house-elf. I just don’t think I can answer for someone else.”

“Why not?”

“Because everyone has a unique situation -social, economic, cultural, personal. There are differing opinions on the intelligence and capabilities of house-elves. I really can’t tell someone else what to do. For instance, my ways would not be acceptable in a upper class Pureblood home.”

This was going to be more difficult than she had thought.

“Okay, let’s start there. How about, *I can’t make decisions for your family, but personally, I would limit the time an elf is in charge of the children?*” Hermione suggested, thinking guiltily of the times her children had been left with Penny, the children’s nursery elf at Malfoy Manor.

“Mmm. That might work. What if we base our reply on the the question *Whom do you choose to influence your child?* That’s easier to answer and won’t be as directly offensive to families who use house-elves. The choice should be left to the parents.”

“Brilliant, Mrs. Weasley. See? That’s why you are right for this job. Now, tell me more,” Hermione smiled. Ah. Molly’s advice column for *Magical Parents Today* was about to be written! She readied her quill to take notes.

Astoria Malfoy and Molly Weasley were in the midst of discussing parent-child bonding when Ginny Potter popped through the floo into the kitchen, followed by her two youngest children.

Astoria froze and compressed her lips. Her eyes narrowed at Ginny Potter, and she paused, quill in hand, waiting for the expected tirade.

“Mum,” greeted Ginny Potter calmly. “Mrs. Malfoy.”

“Mrs. Potter,” acknowledged Astoria with a cool nod.

“Mum told me you would be here with your kids, so I brought mine along to play while you worked.”

Molly beamed, while Hermione’s jaw dropped. Hermione had given up hope that Harry and Ginny would want to be friendly with the Malfoys. A tear came to her eye, and she blinked rapidly to keep more from falling. She took a breath, but didn’t speak. She gazed at Ginny for a moment and turned her eyes to devour the two small Harry Potter look-alikes that stood by Ginny’s side. Molly spoke for her,

“The Malfoy children are in the other room playing with the Quidditch action figures. I’m sure Albus and Lily would love to join them.”

As she left the room, Ginny said casually, “I’ll go with them so you two can keep working. Don’t get up, I’ve got it.” Then she added as she passed the clock, “Mum, look! The clock says that Hermione is home! Weird!”

Astoria froze. Her eyes drifted to the clock and then widened. She glanced back at Molly Weasley. Molly smiled and took her hand.

“Harry told me who you are, Mrs. Mal-um, Hermione. I noticed the clock the last time you were here and bothered him about it until he confessed. Ginny heard me, so she knows too.”

At this, Hermione truly began to weep.

“I’m sorry. I don’t usually cry like this. Pregnancy hormones, most likely.”

She covered her face, and Molly pulled her into a comforting Weasley hug, whispering how much she had missed her and how glad that she was back.

Hermione flooded home to the Manor with the children in tow. Scorpius and Cassie filled Draco in on their impressions of Albus and Lily. Orion and Leo talked incessantly of the Quidditch action figures. Hermione thought they might be a good Christmas present-for Draco.

“Papa, we made new friends,” began Cassie.

“Albus was the boy my age. He’s going to go to Hogwarts too,” added Scorp.

“Lily is a year older than me, but she was nice. They have a huge family with lots of cousins. Papa, do we have cousins?” asked Cassie.

“No, no cousins,” answered Draco. *And thankfully, none with red hair*, he thought to himself.

“Yes, they do too have cousins, Draco. Teddy Lupin is a cousin and my *sister* Daphne has son.” Hermione corrected with a smirk.

Scorpius watched his mother. He noticed that she wasn’t as excited about Daphne’s son as she had been with Harry Potter’s children. It seemed as if the Potters and Mrs. Weasley meant more to his mum than the Greengrasses who were family. He filed that away for future reference. Watching her carefully, he said quietly,

“Mum, Albus asked who our parents were, and Orion told him that our mum was named *Hermione*.”

Silence.

Hermione looked at Draco.

“But I told Albus that ‘Rion was wrong since our mother’s name is Astoria,” laughed Cassie.

“And Granger.” contributed Leo. Orion looked worried.

Draco raised his eyebrows at Hermione. Scorpius watched both closely.

“Yes, well...” began Hermione. “Astoria Greengrass was my maiden name before I married your father. Now it is Astoria Malfoy. Sometimes your papa calls me Hermione, but... it’s just a joke. *Hermione Granger* was a friend of Harry Potter’s, you’ve heard the stories I’ve told you, but she died.” Her lips curved as she gazed at Draco helplessly. *Was this the right time to tell them?* Scorpius narrowed his eyes, but he said nothing.

Draco ushered the children into their nursery suite and told them to dress for dinner. Then he returned to Hermione to get the full scoop.

“Ginny brought her children over to play, Draco. She and Harry changed their minds. I am so happy!” She gave Draco a kiss and spun around. “My little dream came true. I hope it happens again soon.”

“I must say, the Weaslette surprised me,” Draco smiled at Hermione as he watched her remove her clothes and reach for dress robes. He enjoyed seeing his wife’s unclothed body, especially the very round belly holding his child and the full breasts ready to suckle the new infant. Too bad they were so quickly covered up.

“Yes, well, she found out who I am, Draco. Molly figured it out, and Ginny overheard.”

So, in one day, the number of people who knew about Hermione living in Astoria’s body had doubled. Once the rest of the Weasley clan knew, the entire Wizarding world would know. Draco didn’t like that idea at all and frowned.

While they were changing for dinner, she filled Draco in on her visit with Molly Weasley and the new team heading *Magical Parenting Today*.

“Draco, I need money to fund the magazine. I have my staff ready to go and need to pay them this week. Then I’ll need to have funds available for production costs. I think we are close to publishing the first issue.”

Astoria had her own money, of course, but Hermione never remembered that fact. She seemed to consider it all Malfoy money. Hermione had no problem spending Malfoy money on the children and their education, but the magazine was a business venture and a different story.

Draco took a breath.

“Hermione, I don’t want our names associated with this. If I fund this venture, I want to see the magazine and give approval before it goes public, and I want its association with the Malfoy family to be concealed.”

Hermione looked mutinous. “Yes, I agreed already to all that. But Draco, I want you to remember that I lost my life. I lost my name. I lost my future. Now, I have a chance to build a life, a name, and a future as Astoria. I know that Hermione Granger is dead and buried, but why should Astoria Malfoy be the same? I would like to use her name.”

“Absolutely not. I forbid it. If Astoria’s name is used for *your* pursuits, it puts Hermione Granger’s stamp on Astoria. Whatever you do will reflect on her name, her family, her reputation.”

“Astoria didn’t care a fig about her reputation. Look how she treated you!”

“Don’t be too sure. Astoria cared about Pureblood society. Introducing the Muggle world to her friends is a bloody red flag. They won’t believe this project is Astoria’s. They might even believe that Hermione Granger is behind it all.”

Hermione swallowed and thought while she brushed her hair and used her wand to style it. “Okay, Draco. I’ll use a pseudonym as promised. And you can fund the magazine with whatever sneaky Slytherin under-the-table funding methods that you want. Thank you,

Draco.” She bestowed a kiss on his cheek, seeming to assume that Draco had agreed to her request. He turned his head to capture her mouth with his.

All Draco had to do was deny Hermione the funds for the magazine and this problem would go away.

But would it really? Hermione might find another cause to fight for, more public even than this one. Draco was uncomfortable with his involvement. But he recognized that Hermione would never be the pureblood high society witch that the Malfoys expected her to be. She would always be herself, and if he didn’t support her, he knew she might act *without* his approval. He took a breath and fervently hoped that the parenting magazine would die a quick and quiet death.

Chapter Ten: Birth Day

J.K. Rowling gets the credit for birthing a wonderful world.

Camnz gets the credit for this fascinating backstory.

Reviewers get the credit for leading me to restructure.

Chapter Ten— Birth Day

Mrs. Gray answered the floo call and sent Draco to St. Mungo's. The baby was on the way.

"She's early. Is it too early? Wait! Where are the children? Who is watching them?" He began to panic.

"The senior Malfoys are home with the children. They can bring them to visit after the baby is born," reassured Mrs. Gray. She handed him his coat and briefcase and smiled, "A new baby is a wonderful gift of life. Everyone will be fine, Mr. Malfoy. I'm so happy for you both."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gray. You've earned that retirement bonus many times over." Draco stooped to kiss her cheek, and Mrs. Gray's cheeks turned rosy with pleasure.

Draco flooed to St. Mungo's and walked swiftly to the maternity ward. It was becoming a familiar place to visit. *Hopefully, this will be the last time*, he thought dryly. When he entered the room, he was surprised to see Molly Weasley there.

"Mr. Malfoy," Molly greeted him with a hug. "You have an exciting time ahead of you. Now that your husband is with you, dear, I'll leave. Let me know if I can help in any way."

"I'm so glad you could come with me, Molly. Thank you. I think Draco can take over now."

He might as well become a healer. Childbirth was becoming his area of expertise. He stepped over to Hermione and grasped her hand during a contraction. Hermione clung to him until the pain subsided.

Hermione had guessed that number five would be the easiest of all; surely Astoria's body had it down by now, but that was not the case. The labor did not progress, and Hermione grew exhausted. Her hair hung limply about her face. Draco stroked her hair, held her hand, gazed into her eyes, and quietly supported her through the pain.

"This feels so familiar," Hermione moaned.

"To the other four times?" Draco asked.

"No, from when Bellatrix hit me with the Cruciatus curse. You were there looking into my eyes."

"This pain is as bad as the Cruciatus curse?" Draco asked in amazement.

"No, I just mean, you were there for me. You helped me through the pain back then too."

His presence had brought comfort? He hated that memory of Hermione being tortured by Bellatrix and still carried an overwhelming burden of guilt for his part in it all.

"The comparison between being tortured by Bellatrix and giving birth to my children is not exactly reassuring," Draco stated tersely. Hermione laughed between pants.

"I think it's close. You know," Hermione began between contractions, "Natural childbirth worked fine for the other babies, but this time I think I'll have a little help."

A healer was called. Potions were out of the question in Hermione's mind, because she didn't want a substance that might affect the baby, but a simple relaxing spell would give her a breather. Draco too, for that matter. The decision was made, and Draco flicked his wand to enlarge the bed. He slipped in beside his wife to catch a nap before the action began again. Draco again marveled at Hermione's inner strength.

Hours later, when he saw his infant daughter for the first time, his breath caught in his chest and he could scarcely breathe. His emotions were ragged by the sheer effort Hermione had given to birth their daughter, and he struggled to control his tears.

Euphoria filled Hermione at the sight of this precious new life, and she quickly forgot her exhaustion and pain. *Weren't newborns supposed to be bald, wrinkled and red? And ugly? Malfoys really had all the luck.*

Draco cradled his new daughter tenderly. "She's beautiful. She's perfect."

"I forgot how babies slow down time. I could gaze at her all day long. Look at her little nose and sweet lips! Draco, have you ever seen such tiny fingers?"

"Well, yes. Four other times."

"You and Astoria make beautiful babies." Hermione suddenly felt sad that her children would never look like Hermione Granger. On the plus side, at least they wouldn't have to ever deal with bushy hair and buck teeth.

"No, Astoria never gave me children. You and I make beautiful babies."

"Mmmm," agreed Hermione drowsily, "Let me hold her too. What shall we name her?"

"How about after you?"

"Astoria? No way!"

"No, I mean Hermione. I love that name."

"Ha! Hermione? Right! That's a good one. *Hermione Granger Malfoy!* Nothing like announcing to the world the name of your true love."

"How about after my mother?"

"Narcissa? Your mother would be so happy. I also really like Gemini, Draco. It fits the constellation theme we have going. And she is such a little gem, isn't she?"

Draco gazed at the petite face with tiny rosebud lips. Malfoy babies all looked alike, but this baby was exquisitely beautiful.

“Yes,” he agreed soberly, “We’ll name her *Gemini Narcissa*, but we’ll call her Gem. How about that?” Draco bent to kiss the baby and her mum. Just then baby Gemini opened her eyes and let out a shriek. Hermione and Draco jumped. Was that the whimpering cry of a newborn? A healer came into the room and laughed.

“She has *lungs*, that’s for sure! Let’s try to get her feeding.”

Hermione was an expert at breastfeeding her babies, but little Gemini didn’t seem to want to latch on to her mum’s breast. She turned her head and screamed again. Eventually, she calmed down and dozed off, but not before everyone in the room shook their head and took a breath.

“Wow, this little one has *personality!*” The nurse smiled sympathetically and turned to leave. Hermione and Draco glanced at each other with wide eyes.

After Hermione and Draco had napped, Narcissa and Lucius brought the Malfoy children to St. Mungo’s. Scorpius held Orion and Leo’s hands. Narcissa held Cassie’s hand. They tiptoed quietly into the room and peeked at their new sibling. Leo and Orion seemed disappointed, but Scorpius and Cassie each had a turn holding her.

“It’s small,” Leo complained.

“What does it do?” asked Orion.

“Silly boys, babies don’t do anything. They eat and sleep. And the baby is a *she* not an *it*,” corrected Cassie. She stroked the baby’s tiny hand.

“It will be awhile before she can play with you, Orion,” Hermione smiled.

“Then I guess it... *she* won’t want my present,” he said with disappointment.

“Of course, she will want it, let’s see what you brought!”

Orion and Leo darted out of the room and returned shouting, “Happy Birth Day, Baby!” They were bearing a gift tied up in bows. It was a broomstick.

Chapter Eleven: Things Fall Apart

Time for a little drama!

Thanks to J.K. Rowling and camnz.

Chapter Eleven— Things Fall Apart

The new arrival in the Malfoy family was twelve weeks old when Hermione decided to visit Molly Weasley again. Ginny met her at the Burrow with Albus and Lily. Harry was at work, and James, their eldest son, was still at Hogwarts. Greeting Molly and Ginny still seemed a bit awkward. Astoria looked nothing like Hermione, so it was uncomfortable for Molly and Ginny to pull Astoria into their arms as if she were their old friend.

Actually, Hermione didn't feel like herself at all right now anyway. She might be coiffed on the outside, but her mind was fuzzy, she was tearful, and she found herself circling rooms in the Manor, not accomplishing anything. The simplest tasks seemed difficult. Hermione had never before experienced this kind of disorientation and was alarmed. She hoped to consult with Molly.

Mrs. Weasley and Ginny took turns holding little Gemini, marveling at how she had grown. Leo asked about the Quidditch action figures. Hermione mentioned her idea about giving Draco Quidditch action figures next Christmas. It broke the ice, and they laughed together. After returning the baby to Hermione's arms, Ginny took the children into the other room to play.

"Right, here's a new question for you, Molly..." Hermione pulled out a roll of parchment and began reading,

Dear Molly,

My baby won't sleep. She wakes up to eat every hour, day or night, but then throws up everything in her tummy. She must be hungry, but doesn't seem to keep anything down. I can't let her cry to sleep, because she has ear-piercing screams that wake the entire neighborhood. The doctor says she is healthy, just growing at a slower pace than her siblings, but I sense something is wrong. I am not getting any sleep, and I am losing my mind.

Desperate for Help

Hermione looked at Molly. Her mouth trembled and her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, my dear, this letter is from you?" whispered Molly gently. And then a bit later, "The Malfoys have a *neighborhood*?"

Hermione gave a wry laugh through the tears, "Yes, well *neighborhood* was a figure of speech. Molly, I can't believe I'm falling apart like this. The first four children were all so easy. Now, three months into number five's life, I'm ready to throw in the towel. I am sore

from nursing every hour of the day. I cry every time Gemmy cries. What is wrong with me? With Gemmy? What can I do?"

Molly took her hand. "My dear." Hermione noticed that Molly couldn't quite bring herself to use Hermione's name. "My dear... *Hermione*... your problem is lack of sleep. You need to rest. Is Draco helping? What about Narcissa? Or the house-elves? Your first priority is to get some sleep."

"I don't want to be a bother to Narcissa. I should be able to handle this. I have to be there to keep Gemmy from screaming all the time. No one can help her when she is screaming, not even the house elf. Sometimes not even me. And Draco," Hermione's voice broke. "Draco is no longer sleeping with me because I couldn't stand being touched or bothered at night. I told you, I'm going crazy."

"You are not crazy, dear. You are suffering from lack of sleep. Have you used *Muffliato* on the baby's room?"

"I could never do that to my baby. She is crying for a reason. What if she needed me, and I couldn't hear her?"

"Yes, you do have a point. Do you think that the baby is not getting enough nourishment from your breast milk?"

"That must be the reason why she nurses so often. She seems hungry, but never satisfied. I don't recall Scorp or Cassie being big eaters, but Orion and Leo nursed for half an hour at a time and slept for at least four hours at this age. Gemmy only nurses for 5 minutes, spits up, and then she's hungry a half an hour later."

"Here's my advice, dear. Have the healer check little Gemmy's stomach to make sure she is able to digest your breast milk. She shouldn't be vomiting after nursing. Then try my colic potion to calm her stomach and help her sleep. You could also add in a bottle feeding. If she's on a bottle, then someone else can help, and you can get some sleep."

Hermione nodded slowly. She knew that she looked fine, but her mind was foggy. She didn't feel like her confident self. She had trouble making decisions. Her magazine project was forgotten. She had kicked Draco out of her bed. She crumbled whenever Gemmie cried. Her older children were starting to worry about her and comfort her like she was on her deathbed. Molly's ideas were very practical. In fact, Hermione might have thought of them herself if she had been in her right mind.

"Well, I will write this up for the magazine. It's great advice, Molly. Thank you. I'll let you know how it works."

"You need some time for yourself, dear," instructed Molly. "Why don't you run to Diagon Alley for an hour and leave the children here?"

Hermione looked more anxious than excited about this idea. She said doubtfully, "Well, Gemmie is certainly a handful. What if she screams? I don't know if I can do that to you."

"Crying babies don't bother me," replied Molly reassuringly. "They all cry. I can handle a crying baby for one hour or so, and I have Ginny here to help."

“Thank you,” smiled Hermione through new tears, “I’ll stop by Draco’s office to see if he wants to go to lunch. Then I’ll come right back.”

She hugged Molly Weasley and stepped into the floo. “Malfoy Enterprises,” she called.

Draco’s new secretary turned to greet Astoria Malfoy, and Hermione’s eyebrows lifted. The raven-haired woman was not only drop dead gorgeous; she oozed sex appeal. Her navy suit and red blouse were professional but revealed an enticing glimpse of cleavage.

Astoria stood aloof and poised.

“Good morning. I am Mrs. Malfoy here to see my husband.” Astoria smiled icily.

The secretary’s eyes narrowed briefly before she smiled. “Lovely to meet you. Let me tell him that you are here.”

As the secretary entered Draco’s lush office, Astoria’s eyebrows rose again at the sight of the secretary’s very long legs under a short, form-fitting skirt. Where was Mrs. Gray when one needed her?

“Thank you, Suzette. Astoria, you’ve met my new secretary, Suzette Jones?” Draco touched Suzette’s arm before turning to his wife. “Come in, Astoria.”

Astoria rose and entered the office, stepping firmly forward even though she felt that her entire world was shattering into glass splinters around her.

Her breath was shallow, and she felt faint.

“What can I do for you, Astoria?”

“Uh...” Hermione wasn’t sure. Should she launch into a jealous tirade like Ginny Weasley? Suddenly she felt great sympathy for her friend who had been in a similar situation with Astoria Malfoy. Should she pretend everything was fine?

“Draco, how are you?” Hermione tried to see into Draco’s eyes, but they were shuttered.

When was the last time they had talked? Could ten years of marriage fall apart in a mere two months? Seriously, could Draco be under a spell?

“Hermione, I am busy. Get to the point.”

She caught her breath. *What had happened to her sweet husband?* She had to keep herself together and not fall apart. She was terribly emotional right now. *Talk about Molly. Talk about Gemmie.* She inhaled deeply and began,

“I took the children to the Burrow today. Draco, I’ve been having a very difficult time with the baby. You haven’t been around as much, so you might not know.”

“You kicked me out,” he responded curtly.

“Oh, really, Draco, stop sulking,” Hermione snapped. “I wasn’t kicking you out of our lives; I just needed sleep. Molly gave me some very helpful ideas today. It could be that Gemmie is not digesting her milk, which is why she is always hungry and never sleeps. Molly gave me a potion to try for colic. I’m happy because I felt like I was losing my mind.”

Hermione didn't appear happy. Her jaw was clenched. *This has got to be a bad dream*, she thought.

Draco seemed uncaring, "Yes, well that is good news, isn't it? I have good news too. Suzette is going to start attending the formal dinner parties with me so you can stay home with the children. I'm very grateful to her because it's above and beyond a secretary's duties. Mrs. Gray never attended those events."

Aha. Hermione thought. *He threw down the gauntlet himself. I hope he's ready for this battle.*

"Draco, are you sure Suzette is the best person for this job?" she asked in a deceptively sweet voice.

"Best secretary I've ever had. Brilliant, in fact." He held her gaze.

"Are you sure that you want to taint the Malfoy name with gossip when you show up to the Nott's or the Zabini's with your voluptuous new secretary?" This time her voice had a bit more edge to it.

Draco snorted and looked away. "It's what Purebloods do. You know the games they play."

"We haven't been playing those games, Draco. I have been staying home from those horrid dinner parties for the past four years because I hated the games played there.

You haven't been attending many either. If it's important, I would be happy to join you tonight if you need me."

"No. Don't bother. Your presence would not help matters."

"Draco. What is wrong? Talk to me."

Draco looked at her with cold fury in his eyes and rose, "Later. I have an important meeting and will speak to you tonight before I leave for the party."

Hermione rose also. She held her head tall. She attempted to look again into Draco's icy grey eyes. "If your parents are attending this party, they may not be pleased to see *Suzette* as your date."

Draco cringed, but held the door open, "Good-bye, Hermione."

Hermione sailed out the door, furiously blinking the tears away. She missed the widening eyes of Suzette at the front desk. Had Draco Malfoy just called Astoria Malfoy, *Hermione*? Suzette reached into her drawer and pulled out her copy of *Magical Parenting Today*. She opened to the article, *The Malfoys at Home* and began to scan every mention of Astoria Malfoy.

Chapter Twelve: Magical Parenting

All magic belongs to J.K. Rowling.

Chapter Twelve: Magical Parenting

Hermione flooded back to the Burrow to pick up the children. Gemmie was just starting to fuss, and her cries were gaining in pitch and volume. Hermione thanked Molly profusely and rushed everyone back to the Manor. The children ate lunch with the grandparents while Hermione tried nursing the baby upstairs. Hermione wondered if she should mention Draco's new secretary to Narcissa. No. Hermione just couldn't talk about Draco right now. Or his secretary. She kept silent.

After lunch, Hermione joined the children in the schoolroom, half-heartedly helping them with their schoolwork, stroking their shiny hair, and holding each one close before slipping out with the baby in her arms to research books in the Malfoy library on potions, charms, or spells that could alter one's affections. Hermione remembered Draco cruelly rejecting *Astoria* when Hermione first found herself in Astoria's body, but he had always treated *Hermione* with respect even when he was angry. In fact, Hermione was never alarmed by arguments with Draco because they usually ended well. Very well.

Hermione levitated the books she had selected back to the nursery and paused to look again at the most recent family portraits Jane Creevey had sent. The photo shoot had been four weeks after Gemmie's birth, and things had been fine with Draco at that time, she thought. The first moving picture was a formal portrait of the Malfoy family posed on the steps of the Manor, dressed alike in black and gray, blond hair shining in the muted light of the grim and cloudy day. The Manor behind them looked dark and impressive. The family appeared serious and sophisticated, even the baby, for goodness sake.

The next picture showed the children playing in the blanket fort with a silly looking Draco. Hermione smiled. Scorpius would love the one of himself on a broomstick. One sweet picture showed Draco holding baby Gemini, eyes looking downward toward her little face. There was Astoria reading to the children in their nursery library; the children cuddled around her were looking either into her face or into the pages of the book. Finally, Hermione picked up the picture of Draco and Astoria. Her eyes couldn't leave it, but her mind couldn't assess it at all. What did she see in Draco's eyes, hands, stance? She didn't know. Her mind was still fuzzy and tired, whirling with uncertainty and pain.

Geminie fussed loudly again, so Hermione fed the baby as she levitated a book, turning pages with her wand to read. She paused in her research to burp Gemmie and then had to change all of the baby's clothes and her own after Gemmie threw up her milk. Hermione rocked the baby to sleep, staring at the starry ceiling, thinking about possible spells Draco could be under. After awhile, she noticed Cassie standing hesitantly in the doorway. Hermione held her fingers to her lips and laid the baby down in her crib before tiptoeing out to Cassie.

“What’s the matter, sweetheart?” Hermione whispered.

“I miss you, Mummy. I miss Papa too.” Cassie’s lips trembled.

“Oh, sweetheart, I’ve been so tired and cranky lately. I’m sorry.” Hermione enveloped her daughter in a hug, stroking her long silvery blond hair. “Would you like a story?”

“Yes! Let me get the boys!”

The four children gathered inside the blanket fort. It was a creative, homey place made of blankets and magic, big enough for the entire family to fit, with one cozy room on the side and a ladder leading to an upstairs blanket loft. The floors were covered with pillows, perfect for reading books or having pillow fights. The children snuggled around their mum while Hermione read A.A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh*. They laughed at Pooh’s antics and funny poems. The charms on each page made the illustrations of Pooh gaze at the sky and then turn his head toward Piglet. It would have been pure bliss if it weren’t for the agony at the periphery of Hermione’s mind or the tears at the edge of her voice.

Draco found the five of them there inside the blanket fort when he arrived home and listened from a distance. He turned his head away from the sounds of Hermione’s voice reading *Winnie the Pooh* and was about to step out when the baby awoke and cried. Draco turned back to the starry night nursery and picked up Gemini. Instead of arching her back and screaming like she often did, Gemmie nestled in close to her papa. He was trapped. Trapped in the nursery. Trapped by his enchanting children. Caught in the net of the people he loved most.

Hermione wriggled out of their blanket fort, leaving the children to pretend they were inside Rabbit’s house visiting with Pooh. Cassie wanted to be Rabbit, Orion Pooh, and Leo Piglet. She didn’t hear what Scorpius’s role was, because she needed to leave quickly before tears fell. When she rose to her feet, Hermione noticed Draco rocking Gemmie and stood very still. Draco tightened his lips and stared unkindly at Hermione. She shivered.

“Shall I take her for you?” asked Hermione calmly.

“No, she’s happy,” answered Draco coldly. Hermione looked curiously at Draco. Would his eyes meet hers? Could she read them? *Argh! What is wrong with him?* Hermione felt like screaming. Instead she drew a calming breath, rubbed her tired eyes, and stepped over to the photos she had been looking at earlier.

“Have you seen Jane’s latest photos?” Hermione asked pleasantly.

“Why, yes, I have,” drawled Draco grimly.

“Really?” Hermione replied in disbelief. “Did Jane send you copies too? I thought they were very good.”

Draco pulled out his wand and summoned something from his briefcase. It floated over to Hermione. She reached for it and gasped. It was a glossy magazine titled *Magical Parenting Today*.

“What is this?” she gasped. “How could *you* have a copy before *me*? Did they publish it without my approval? Oh, Godric, *no*,” Hermione moaned.

The cover of *Magical Parenting Today* featured the Malfoy family regally arranged on the steps of the Malfoy Manor. Jane Creevey's photos. *The Malfoys at Home* was the title on the cover. Hermione glanced at Draco nervously and turned a page. Astoria Malfoy was the name of the editor-in-chief. Astoria Malfoy also was given credit for the articles on *Day Trips to Muggle England*, *Muggle Books Your Children Will Love*, and *Getting Ready for Hogwarts*. Hermione flipped through the pages, skipping *Magical Fashions*, the *Ask Molly* column, and an article titled *Safe Spells for Young Children* until she reached the Malfoy feature.

The recent Malfoy family portraits were spread throughout the article. It did make a pleasing contrast, Hermione had to admit. The formal portrait of Malfoys on the steps of the Malfoy Manor was a bit intimidating. Turn the page and the Malfoys became silly and fun in their magical blanket fort. Jane was a genius at capturing the personalities of the children and their parents. A wry smile here, a smirk there, a grin from the littlest boys, a wistful glance from Cassie. It was evident that the family loved each other.

Turn another page and one could view the children's library and the kids curled around Astoria as she read *Peter Rabbit*. The playroom, schoolroom, library, and starry night nursery were featured more prominently than the children here, Hermione thought with a sigh of relief. It was Jane Creevey's terrific eye, Anna McGuire's fashion sense, and Roy Thomas' page design, of course. She turned the page to see an intimate photo of Astoria and Draco gazing at each other. Her stomach began to sink.

Near the husband and wife photo was a column by Gloria Van Duzen articulating Astoria's vision for the magazine. Education for parents was her primary goal, but Astoria also shared her hopes for a future in which witches and wizards of all backgrounds esteemed one another, learned from one another, and worked together for tolerance and respect. Her views of equality for women were stated. An entire paragraph was devoted to her furious rejection of arranged marriages in which children were pledged to one another in order to strengthen *bloodlines* or *businesses*. Hermione Granger would have been proud, but it was certainly not anything Astoria Malfoy would have approved. She lifted her eyes to Draco's accusing glare.

"Oh," she said simply as she sank to a chair.

"Right. Not exactly what *we* had talked about, is it? Imagine my *delight* to see the Malfoy family front and center, with *Astoria Malfoy* preaching Muggle love to the masses."

"We were supposed to start without any mention of Muggles. I was going to challenge arranged marriages gently. I never intended for our family to be featured. Astoria's name wasn't going to be listed as editor or writer." Hermione swallowed, but the lump was still there.

Draco said not a word, but narrowed his eyes.

The truth was that this mess was her responsibility. She had put the team together, urged them to fly without her, and then abandoned the project when things got overwhelming at home. They might have even thought they were honoring Astoria Malfoy with a tribute.

"I'm so sorry, Draco."

"Tonight I'll be attending Theo Nott's dinner party. I'll try to repair the damage you've caused the Malfoy name if I can. This should be *fun*," he said bitterly. "Tomorrow night I'll attend the Parkinson party."

“I’ll join you,” Hermione decided and hoped there was a formal dress in her closet that she could squeeze into.

“Bad idea. No one will want you there. I frankly do not want to be seen with you.”

Hermione winced. “Not everyone will have read the magazine. I hadn’t even seen it before now.”

“They will have seen it,” Draco replied knowingly, “And it won’t be pretty. This will mean war. You may want to start packing for your parents’ house tonight.”

Astoria’s lovely face was distorted by Hermione’s furrowed brow and stubborn chin. She was a Gryffindor; she wasn’t about to give up her marriage or her magazine without a fight. And she certainly wasn’t going to run away.

Chapter Thirteen: Astoria's Return

J.K. Rowling created Harry Potter., et. al

Camnz painted this picture of Pureblood society.

Chapter Thirteen— Astoria's Return

Hermione was exhausted. Her mind kept shutting down. She dozed briefly when Gemini slept, then wearily called a house-elf to help her dress while the children ate dinner in the nursery. The house-elf fixed her dress, hair and make-up, and Hermione scanned her books on spells, charms, and potions. She understood Draco's anger, but she didn't understand the secretary at all. The previous Astoria had been the one to stray, not Draco. He genuinely loved his family, didn't he? It *must* be a spell.

When the House-elf pronounced Astoria ready for the evening, Hermione rose elegantly, but ended up throwing off her dress to feed the baby one last time before she left. She and the house-elf frantically rearranged her dress and smoothed her hair. Hermione gave Gemmie a small dose of potion for colic and instructed Penny to send a house-elf immediately if Gemmie needed her. She kissed each of her children goodnight and raced through the hallway, pausing at the top of the stairs.

A wave of déjà vu swept over Hermione as she recalled ten years ago, when she had descended the staircase for the first time to join Draco, Lucius, and Narcissa on their way to a pureblood dinner party. Just like ten years before, Narcissa wore a look of disapproval on her face.

"You're late," stated Narcissa in a flat voice. Lucius and Draco watched Astoria through narrowed eyes. Had the elder Malfoys read *Magical Parenting Today*? It seemed so. The tide had turned. Astoria was on the outs. She was trouble once again.

Hermione looked searchingly in Draco's eyes, but did not find anything reassuring. She placed her hand on Draco's arm and they side-apparated to Theodore Nott's manor. As they stepped inside, Draco placed his hand on the small of Astoria's back and ushered her to the bar. But when he noticed his secretary Suzette standing near Theo, he dropped his hand and left Astoria alone. *What? Draco never left Astoria alone!* Even when he had suspected she was meeting lovers on the side, he had kept his hand on her as if to make her behave. Was this an insult to his own wife? What had he said? He didn't want to be seen with her? *Well*, decided Hermione, *two can play this game*.

Narcissa and Lucius collected their drinks and moved away to greet friends; Astoria was left standing alone. No one came over. No one met her eye. This evening might be more difficult than she had anticipated. Fortunately, Daphne Greengrass glided over to speak to her, and Hermione was never more thankful to see Astoria's sister.

“So, *dear* sister, I see that you have once again made fools of your precious *Malfoy* family.”

“Wonderful to see you too, Daphne. How *is* your son?” Astoria drawled.

“Charles is doing very well at Hogwarts. *Your* children, though-I feel sorry for the poor *Malfoy* children.”

“How so? My children are delightful, thank you very much.” Hermione considered Daphne’s son and wasn’t too worried about her own children.

“So delightful that you have decided to teach the rest of the Wizarding population how to raise their children like Muggles, hmmm? What a stain on Pureblood society!” Daphne hissed spitefully.

Daphne was kicking her own sister when she was down? She seemed almost gleeful. What a terrible sister. Had she forgotten Astoria’s kindnesses over the past ten years?

“I have no idea what you are referring to.” Astoria responded airily.

Daphne’s voice grew louder, “Of course you know. You *wrote* the stupid magazine-*Magical Parenting Today*.”

Astoria looked vague. “I’m sorry? What magazine?”

A crowd was gathering, not to speak to Astoria, but to hear what she had to say.

Daphne waved her wand and the magazine appeared. “This!” she hissed. “Don’t tell me you know nothing about *this*!”

Astoria ruffled through the pages with a blank look on her face. “No, I’ve not seen it. How strange. I remember having our family portrait done. I can highly recommend the photographer if you need one. Jane Creevey. Cassie’s dress is charming, don’t you think?” And she tossed the magazine on the table, moving to another part of the room. Daphne followed, hissing insults. Several women trailed, hoping to glean some gossip.

When Daphne and her entourage finished, Theo Nott joined Astoria and handed her a drink. “What are you trying to prove, Astoria?”

“Hello, Theo. What *do* you mean? I think my dress is lovely, don’t you?”

“Why are you trying to introduce the Muggle world to wizarding families?”

Astoria looked blankly at Theo. “Why ever would I do such a strange thing?”

Draco watched from afar and had to turn away to hide his smile. It would never work, but she was doing her best, he had to admit. Maybe he should make his way over to help her out. He took a step toward Astoria, but his arm was instantly clutched by Suzette, who whispered that she needed an introduction to an important businessman in the other room.

Some couples lifted their noses and turned their backs when Astoria came near. *The cold shoulder, the classic cut*, Hermione smirked to herself. Others frowned and lectured her on her audacious journalism. Astoria listened politely and looked confused or bored.

Once she felt a hand squeeze her arm, and she turned to hear a whispered, "Thank you," as a young pureblood wife slipped by on her way to her older husband. She looked fifteen and her husband looked forty-five, but both could have been older.

Hermione was suddenly enraged. Who was speaking for those who had no voice? Who was speaking for the children married off without any say in the matter? Who was speaking up for the Muggleborn witches and wizards? *No one!* Now, Hermione had proof that at least one high society pureblood witch approved her message. Astoria had to lower her eyes to hide the glint of battle shining within. If there was one witch who needed her to speak out, there could be more. She was sorry that she had inadvertently caused the Malfoys grief, but she would *never* recant the message from Astoria Malfoy in *Magical Parenting Today*. Astoria lifted her head, breathed deeply, and entered the dining room regally, bored and unaffected by the stir she was causing.

At dinner, she was seated next to Blaise Zabini and his wife Cho Chang. Another former Slytherin whose advances she'd had to fight off ten years earlier. Draco should have been placed on her other side, but was apparently seated with Suzette across the table. *How mortifying!* Acting unconcerned, Astoria carried on a conversation with Blaise that was her best imitation of a dumb blonde snob. *The Malfoys should be so proud*, she thought vindictively. She didn't bother looking at Draco. If she had, she would have seen his lips twitch a few times.

Suddenly, Blaise's wife Cho leaned forward and spoke around her husband.

"Astoria, you sound like you don't know much about the new magazine, but I want you to tell whoever is in charge that I read it cover to cover today and *loved* it. It's exactly what we need. It's going to be very popular, I think. Would you consider a column by a pureblood witch on the proper etiquettes of pureblood society? I really think that would go over well. It would help *me* as a parent, that's for sure. I bet Narcissa could write it."

Hermione choked on her drink.

Cho continued, "And I have discovered the *most exciting* new magical toy in China that will be a hit with the young ones this year. It should be featured in the one of the next issues, maybe for Christmas."

Hermione blinked. Blaise rolled his eyes. Draco was all ears even though his attention was focused on Suzette.

"My *dear*, fashion is *my thing*, you know, but I can't imagine how those people got my name. Your new toy sounds *fabulous*. Send them an owl or something. I can't be bothered." But she looked into Cho's eyes and smiled. It was her first and only smile of the night.

After dinner, Astoria spent more time with the Zabini's and an old pureblood witch who was simply delighted that Astoria was speaking up for the powerless female elite. Astoria had a difficult time escaping her clutches. Unfortunately, it was Theo Nott who rescued her. She was grateful, but also very careful to keep him from maneuvering her into an empty room. Hermione felt very uncomfortable remembering that Theo was one of Astoria's old flings. Without Draco nearby, Theo might become annoying. Still, it was very kind of the host to look out for her even if she did occasionally have to step away from his straying hands.

Astoria left early to feed the baby and check on the children. Draco left a bit later with his parents and an invitation for the Malfoys to bring their children to a private dinner at the Zabini's. Some family heads had frowned disapprovingly at Draco and refused to acknowledge him, but several older witches had patted his arm and winked bright eyes at him to show their approval of his newest family venture.

Chapter Fourteen: Wrong Wife

I love Draco and Hermione conflict.

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Thanks to all the supportive readers and reviewers!

I am posting two chapters today, so make sure you read Chapter Thirteen too.

Chapter Fourteen— Wrong Wife

Draco leaned against the door and smiled slowly at his wife. She was fast asleep in flannel pajamas curled up next to the baby. Her dress from the party lay in a crumpled heap on the floor. Draco stared regretfully at the dress, remembering the many times that he had been the one to hastily remove similar dresses. Draco knew that this baby had been hard on Hermione. He knew that he should be a better help, a better husband and father. He saw traces of tears on her cheek and knew that he loved this woman very much. He removed his dress robes, trousers and shirt. He slid into bed beside his wife, stroking her hair until he fell asleep next to the woman he loved.

Hermione awoke when the baby stirred. She lifted her from the bed and carried her to her starry night nursery, hoping that she would stay asleep. Then she stumbled back to bed, only to bump into... Draco. She froze. Part of her wanted to reach out and pull him close to make everything right again. But part of her wanted to rant, rave, and scream at him. Oh, she was so angry.

"Granger..." mumbled Draco as he felt her stiffen in the bed beside him. His eyes opened sleepily. "Hermione, you were brilliant tonight. I really didn't think your presence would help matters, but you were bloody perfect."

Hermione allowed herself a small smile as she accepted the compliment. She thought it had gone rather well herself.

"Well, I hoped to fix the mess that I inadvertently created. It wasn't my intention at all to harm the Malfoy name."

"I know. Come here." Draco reached out for his wife, but Hermione was still stiff next to him.

"So, what is going on with Suzette? She's going to have to go, you know."

"Nothing is going on. I can't let her go, Hermione, she is saving my arse right now."

"No, that's my job. I'm your wife." When Draco didn't respond, she mumbled, "I remember Helen Parr saying something like that in *The Incredibles*." Draco chuckled. He thought the worst was over, but suddenly Hermione rose out of bed and began pacing the floor.

“Since when is a *secretary* so bloody important that you have to follow her all around at the party, sitting with her *instead of your wife* at dinner?”

Oh, no. Draco’s anger was gone, but it was clear that Hermione’s was just beginning.

Draco ran his fingers through his mussed hair and thought. How much could he share? Hermione continued,

“I agree that I performed Astoria well enough tonight, but the fact of the matter is, you and your parents grossly insulted me when you ignored me the entire night. You snubbed your own wife in front of pure blood society. That was not only inappropriate; it was incredibly hurtful. I am your *wife*. You stick by *me* when the going gets tough.”

“Actually, you are not my wife, Hermione. I married Astoria, not you.”

Hermione recoiled as if Draco had physically slapped her.

“What?” she shrieked. ‘What do you mean I am not your wife? What is this then?’ She clasped hands with Draco until the silver bond of marriage swirled around their wrists. “I’m the best wife you have ever had and the best one you are ever going to get. I’ve given you five children and very happy memories, not to mention ten years of fantastic sex. What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that I married Astoria. The world knows that I’ve married Astoria. I’ve never married Hermione Granger.” He was rather hoping the world would never find out.

“Are you saying that you want Astoria back? Is that what this thing with Suzette is? You miss Astoria?”

“No, love. You are the woman I want, but I think *we* should get married. We can renew our vows.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “How sweet,” she said sarcastically. “*Now* you are all of a sudden very romantic after ten years of *unwedded* bliss. Let’s drop the discussion about which wife you are married to and get back to the topic at hand. Why on earth would you need to spend the evening with Suzette? What kind of hold does she have on you?”

Maybe there was no enchantment blocking his affections. No spell. No potion. Maybe it was something rational. That was even scarier, Hermione thought. Her lips tightened. She wanted the truth; she wanted it *now*. And it had better be good.

Draco sighed. Hermione was, as usual, cutting to the heart of the issue. He had the feeling that she was not going to see his side. The outcome of this argument did not bode well for him at all.

“Why don’t we get some sleep and talk in the morning?” he suggested.

“Why don’t you tell me about Suzette now? Then we can sleep and talk in the morning,” countered Hermione.

“Suzette came highly recommended from Mr. Parkinson, Pansy’s father, and my father seemed to think that we owed it to him to try her out. Hermione, she has saved me money, time, and embarrassment. She has some great ideas for countering the damage Malfoy Enterprises. is going to see from *Magical Parenting*. She is a genius at suggesting tactics

before business meetings. She's fantastic at sales. And she rather helped out tonight by gleaning information from people. Wizards were turning their backs tonight on me, too, Hermione, and I needed to know some things."

"Hmm. Sounds like you should make her a business partner. Or better yet, *sell* her the bloody business. I'd be happy to hand it over to her on a silver Malfoy platter," Hermione threatened biting. "Just tell her to *leave you alone*. I don't want her in the office with you. I don't want her at social gatherings with you. I don't want you *dancing* with her. If you two are not a couple, then you need to stop acting like one."

Draco smiled to himself. *Hermione was jealous*. It was funny because he knew that she had nothing to fear, but he respected those feelings, remembering when he had been almost consumed by jealousy and anger himself. Hermione had been the one who helped defeat all those ugly feelings inside of him. Now it was his turn to do the same for her.

"Come here, Hermione. It's you I love. It's you I want. Forget about Suzette."

"I'll forget about Suzette once she is gone. This is serious, Draco. We have another dinner party tomorrow night and I want to know what to expect."

"I can promise you that I'll stand by you the entire time tomorrow night."

"Okay then. That's a start. Now, what did Suzette learn tonight that was so bloody important you had to snub your *wife* for three hours?"

Draco drew a breath. "She learned that the Ministry is going to freeze all our assets on Monday morning. Malfoy Enterprises is to be penalized for funding a Wizard venture that supports integration with the Muggle world. Tomorrow I am going to transfer some funds so we have enough to live on for who knows how long? A month? A year? Hopefully, Malfoy Enterprises will survive this."

Hermione was shocked. "*The Ministry*? They can do that? Why would the Ministry freeze Malfoy assets over a *magazine* article? What about freedom of speech?"

"They'll probably pass a bill next week limiting freedom of speech if they haven't done so already."

"This. Is. Wrong." A viciously angry Hermione punched the air. She looked ready to pull her wand and fight Voldemort all over again.

"I know. I'm doing what I can."

"Yes, but what you can do is very different from what I can do. I'm going to fight this with every ounce of my being. I'm going to fight their abuse of power with a barrage of media. I'm going to call in Rita Skeeter."

"NO, Hermione! We *don't* want to make more waves! We want to calm things down, not make things worse! You *can't* do those things."

"I can, and I will. Doesn't Astoria have money too? Draco, I want you to withdraw all of Astoria's funds tomorrow. Let's open an account in a Muggle bank under Cassie's name. Then we will have money to print more issues of *Magical Parenting Today*."

Draco's heart began to sink. "No, Hermione, we can't print any more. This is the end of the magazine. When the Ministry sees that we will agreeably turn over the magazine to their control, then they will leave us alone."

"WHAT?" shrieked Hermione. "Turn over the magazine? To the Ministry? No *BLOODY* way! Over *my dead body* will I turn over my magazine!"

"Hermione, that is exactly it. I don't want to have a dead body for a wife. I would much prefer a living wife I can shag than a magazine I can read."

Hermione's lips twitched, and she calmed down. "Purebloods are *that* serious about keeping the Wizarding world separate from the Muggle world? We're talking death threats?"

"Yes, Hermione, I told you at the very beginning that this was a dangerous venture. I do fear for our lives right now. In fact, I think you should pack and take the children to your parent's home tomorrow."

"Draco, you know that I would do everything to keep our kids safe, right? Well, something happened to me tonight that changed me forever. You see, this magazine was about Hermione before tonight. It was about a very small contribution that Hermione Granger could make to better the world. I know that I have to be Astoria for the rest of my life, and I just needed to do something more with this life. But tonight, Draco, I discovered that this magazine has the potential to speak for voices that have been silenced. Do you see? It's beyond Hermione. It's beyond Astoria. It's beyond Malfoy Enterprises. The press must *not be silenced*."

Draco's eyes hardened. "Do I take it to mean that you are going to put this magazine before the safety of our children?"

"Yes, I do mean that. I will do everything to keep them safe, of course, but frankly, our children are privileged, Draco. Their chances of surviving another war, gods forbid, are much better than those children without a voice."

"What kind of a mother are you that you would endanger your own children?"

"The kind of a mother who wants a *better world* for her children."

"Hermione, I can't stand by you if you choose this path."

"Ha! You didn't stand by me earlier tonight, before I chose this path."

"That was for appearances."

"I *knew* it." Hermione looked disgustedly at Draco. Disappointment clouded her face. Tears came to her eyes. "You snubbed your own wife because you were concerned with *appearances*. We are back in the drawing room with Bellatrix threatening me and you standing by doing *nothing* because you are concerned with appearances."

Draco was furious. "I knew your forgiveness was too good to be true. Suddenly the past becomes your ammunition. How dare you suggest that I am doing *nothing*! I am *protecting* our family. You are *endangering* our family. Let's keep our definitions straight here."

"Oh, no. *You* are endangering our family. Your secretary *Suzette* is endangering our family and our family's reputation. Get your priorities straight, Draco."

Just then the baby screamed from the nursery. Hermione snorted in disbelief. She marched to the door and yanked it open.

“I’m getting the baby. When I get back, you had better be gone. There is no way I am sleeping with you tonight. You are married to the wrong wife, Draco, and I am sorry for you.”

Chapter Fifteen: Truth

Since I posted two chapters yesterday, I don't want you to miss either of them!

Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen are essential to the plot.

Thanks to J.K. Rowling and Camnz.

Chapter Fifteen— Truth

Hermione awoke with a splitting headache. Her limbs were heavy and she felt like she still needed to sleep. It might take months to get over everything that happened yesterday. Meeting Molly, Suzette the surprise secretary, the unexpected publishing of *Magical Parenting Today*, the party at the Nott's, and then a blowout fight with Draco last night. Could things possibly get worse? Her mind was foggy from lack of sleep and the stupid headache, but she rushed into the nursery to gather her screaming infant. Gemini shrieked all the way back to the Malfoy suite and Hermione began nursing her while sitting on the bed.

Hermione used her wand to remove her headache, then switched the baby to the other breast. She rested on her pillow and thought carefully about what was said the night before. She missed Draco so much. She missed how they worked together. Was she right? Was Draco right? How should she move forward? She should not jeopardize her relationship with Draco, Hermione believed. They desperately needed to work this out. They both wanted the best for the family, for the children. Draco *must* fire his secretary. And should she shut down *Magical Parenting Today*? No! She couldn't. Keeping the magazine going was essential right now. She believed that it was wrong for the Ministry to dictate journalistic content, but she also recognized that Draco was right about putting their children first. Draco always thought that it had to be one or the other, for example, either the family or the magazine; she believed it was possible to do it all. If Draco forced her to shut the magazine down, she would. Without being resentful. The marriage and the children should come first. She would be Astoria and lay Hermione to rest.

Today. So much to do. Her brain was still foggy. Priorities. First, she needed to take Gemini to the healer at St. Mungo as Molly had suggested. Second, she needed to talk to her team at *MPT*. Third, she needed to pack for their stay at her parents' house. Last, she needed to get her hair done and buy a new dress for the party tonight. The dress she wore last night had been uncomfortably tight, but if money was going to be an issue for the family, maybe she should skip the gown. It would be a relief to not have to shop today anyway. She'd tackle everything in order of importance. Gemmie was first. Hermione called in Penny and the children.

"Morning, sweethearts. We might be taking a trip soon, so could you pack your things for me? Let's make a list: jeans, trousers, jumpers, t-shirts, pajamas, swim suit, socks, shoes, underwear, hair brush, tooth brush, favorite toy and book. Gemmie and I are going to see a healer today, but I will check your packing when we return."

The children agreed and ran to their rooms to pack. Hermione gave the baby to Penny and headed toward the shower. Scorpius stayed behind and gazed quietly at his mother. She turned around and sat back down on the bed.

“What is it, Scorpius?” she asked gently.

“I woke up last night. I heard you tell dad to leave. Are you mad at him, Mum? Is he going to come back?” Scorpius’ voice trembled.

“Of course, he is coming back, Scorpius. I’m sorry you heard me yell at your papa. We are just not seeing eye to eye right now, but we’ll work things out. We always do.” Yes, Hermione did believe this to be true.

“Is it about the magazine?” Scorpius asked. Now, how did he know about that? Oh yes, one of their discussions had taken place in the nursery near the blanket fort. *Blast!* She had wanted to keep the children out of this.

“The magazine is part of it,” admitted Hermione.

“I read through it, Mum. I thought you sounded really smart.”

“Oh, Scorpius. Some people are angry about it because not everyone sees things the same way. I must try to respect other views even if I disagree.”

“Mum, is Papa a bad man?”

“Why ever would you think that? Of course, he isn’t a bad man!” Hermione looked alarmed.

“Albus Potter told me that Papa was a Death Eater in the last war. Death Eaters are evil.”

Hermione remembered the Dark Mark tattooed on Draco’s arm and glanced down at her own arm, searching for the word *Mudblood* that Bellatrix had carved into her flesh. Sadly, she realized that Hermione’s body was gone and along with it, the Mudblood tattoo. It was very strange to miss it. Astoria’s arm was without blemish. Then Hermione looked into Scorpius’ serious eyes.

“Scorpius, this is something you should really talk to your father about. I’m certain that he has important things to tell you about that time of his life. But here’s what I can tell you—at a very young age, your father made a decision he later regretted to be a follower of Voldemort. He did it because he thought it would please his father and protect his mother. Your father is not a bad man. He is a very good man, and his life is different now.”

Hermione desperately hoped that history wasn’t repeating itself and that her words rang true.

“Any more questions, Scorpius?”

“Are you friends with Harry Potter?”

“Yes, of course, I am. Ginny Potter and Molly Weasley too. Why do you ask?”

“Because of the stories you tell us about Harry Potter. Mum, sometimes you tell them like you were there too. Were you?”

“Oh. I suppose I was around. Anyway, the stories are all true, so if you ever need anything and Papa or Mummy are not around, you can always go to Harry Potter.”

“Mum, are you really Hermione Granger?”

Hermione’s eyes grew large. She didn’t know what to say. “Oh, Scorpius,” was all she could manage.

“Mum. Tell me the truth. Dad calls you Hermione, and you know all the stories about Harry Potter. I know it’s true. You *are* Hermione Granger.”

“I am totally astonished, Scorpius. You are a very smart boy. Yes, it’s true.”

“So you aren’t really Astoria Greengrass?”

“I guess you could say that I’m Astoria on the outside and Hermione on the inside. This body belongs to Astoria, but she died, and somehow Hermione’s spirit landed here when Hermione was killed. It’s not something we talk about because it’s rather unbelievable, don’t you think? I think we won’t tell your brothers and sisters until they are older.”

Scorpius nodded.

“When you attend Hogwarts, Scorpius, it could very well happen that someone gives you a bad time about your father being a former Death Eater. A person could even hate *you* because of it. Or a person could say bad things about Astoria Greengrass *or* Hermione Granger. Scorpius, I don’t want you to hate them back, okay? I want you to make peace if you can. Just remember how much your father and I love you; during the war, we may have done some bad things, but we are not bad people and neither are you.”

Scorpius was silent. He hugged his mother, and she hugged him back very hard. He was tall and thin. A sweet, observant boy. Thoughtful, just like his father.

Chapter Sixteen: Accolades

All rights to J.K. Rowling for everything *Harry Potter*.

All thanks to camnz for suggesting I try a sequel to *Wrong Life*.

All gratitude to readers and reviewers for your encouragement!

Chapter Sixteen: Accolades

Hermione made a floo-call to gather her team together for a meeting at 2:00 p.m. She had to brush aside Anna McGuire's squeals of excitement. Apparently, *Magical Parenting Today* had sold out in Diagon Alley, and they were beginning a second run. No word yet on the magazine's status in the rest of the British Wizarding world.

After a quick bite of breakfast, Hermione flooded to St. Mungo's with Gemini to see if they could find anything wrong with her baby's digestion. It was 8:30 a.m. This could potentially take all day, but fortunately, the right Healers were free at the right time-just as Gemmie was getting wound up to her screaming fit. The Healers observed Hermione nursing her baby, then witnessed Gemmie vomiting up the milk all over Hermione. She cleaned it up with a quick *Scourgify* and bounced Gemini on her little tummy until she relaxed.

The Healers used their wands to perform various tests and asked her questions.

"How long does she sleep at night?"

"How long does she nurse?"

"How long between feedings?"

"Have you tried changing *your* diet at all?"

She answered their questions with a faint, but growing hope that the Healers would help.

The team of Healers consulted together and then met with Hermione. When they entered the room again, she was surprised at the topic of conversation.

"Brilliant new magazine, Mrs. Malfoy," said one.

"*Magical Parenting Today* is just what our Wizarding families need," said another. "I like how you are integrating the Wizarding world with the Muggle world. I subscribe to Muggle medical journals myself, you know."

"I have an idea for an article," suggested the third Healer, "Top Ten Reasons Children Visit St. Mungo's-it would be an article about prevention of accidents, of course."

"Sounds wonderful," replied Astoria faintly, "Please send me a copy."

It took awhile to get their attention focused back on her infant. Gemini's shriek and arched back reminded them. Their diagnosis was that she was, in fact, thriving, but suffered from gas, possibly resulting from an allergy to something in Hermione's diet. It was believed that Gemmie would soon outgrow her discomfort and pain. Mrs. Weasley's colic potion was approved.

"What this little one needs is a strict schedule," suggested the woman Healer. Hermione looked at her in horror. *Schedule?* She couldn't imagine fighting Gemmie's ear-piercing screams to put her on a schedule.

"Yes, really," laughed the Healer. "She will be a happier baby, and you will be a healthier mother. The goal is to gradually increase her feeding time, so she can go longer without nursing. She needs a longer sleeping time just as much as you do." She gave Hermione several timetables for nursing and sleeping schedules and assured her that she could adapt them to fit her baby as long as she saw progress.

"I know you don't feel comfortable using the *Muffliato* spell on your infant, but some babies do need to cry to sleep and she does have a particularly alarming cry. You might consider it when adjusting her to the schedule."

Hermione felt both relief at receiving the good news regarding Gemini's health and tremendous stress at the future battles in store. She thanked the Healers profusely and departed, noting the copies of *Magical Parenting Today* scattered around the waiting room of St. Mungo's.

The party was in full swing when Hermione arrived. *Wait—party?* Hermione frowned and panicked slightly. This was an important meeting with her editorial team. What was going on here?

"Astoria Malfoy, Queen of the Day!" sang George Weasley as he ushered her into the small office they used for *Magical Parenting Today*. "Here she is everyone! Let's toast Astoria Malfoy, the only witch brave enough to say it like it is! Here's to a successful magazine that guides the futures of our smallest witches and tiniest wizards!"

Hermione looked around the room in a daze. Anna McGuire was there, beaming, hand in hand with Roy Thomas, who was talking Quidditch with Harry Potter. Jane Creevey was clicking away with her camera. Angelina Weasley was cutting cake. Molly was there, blushing as she received hugs from her admirers: George and Ginny. Gloria looked uncomfortable. *Gloria*-Hermione's eyes narrowed-the witch with pureblood ties.

"I came over to pick up more copies of *MPT* for my store and thought we'd have a party to celebrate! The cake's on me. I want three full pages of advertising for the next six issues, Mrs. Malfoy. Brilliant, simply brilliant!" George Weasley was clearly happy about advertising his joke shop, Weasley's Wizard Wheezes.

Hermione nodded and made the rounds, shaking everyone's hands, and graciously accepting their congratulations. *Such a difference from last night*, she thought with a wry smile. After visiting for a time, she glanced at the clock and began to panic. There was so much to do and discuss before she needed to leave. George Weasley rescued her, crying out,

“Speech! Speech from Lady Astoria Malfoy, Visionary and Creator of *Magical Parenting Today!*”

The room grew quiet. Astoria cleared her throat.

“Thank you so much for your encouragement and kind words. My part was small. The team you see here: Anna, Gloria, Roy, Molly, and Jane produced this incredible magazine. I am proud of their work. It is tremendously meaningful to hear your accolades because not everyone feels as you do. Because Astoria Malfoy’s beliefs about Muggles were revealed earlier than I anticipated,” here Hermione’s eyes rested upon Gloria, “we are now at war. War in the publishing world, I mean. It is rumored that the Ministry of Magic plans to freeze all Malfoy assets and take over the magazine. Right now, I must meet with my team to strategize the next steps or they will be without a job and *MPT* will die an early death. Thanks to everyone for the celebration. If you’d like to stay and help plan, you are welcome. If you need to distance yourself from a renegade publication, so be it.” Astoria spoke wearily.

The room was silenced with shock. Horror dawned on the faces of the magazine team. Molly Weasley began clearing up the mess of the party. They gathered around the table. No one left the room. Harry polished his glasses. Ginny rested her hand on his arm.

“First item on the agenda,” began Hermione, “is our team. Do any of you wish to leave your position? We will be operating two different fronts, this office, which I assume the Ministry will close down, and another front, location to be determined. Draco will be transferring funds to a Muggle bank as soon as possible so our team will continue to be paid. The question is: are you worried for your safety or your career? Do you wish to leave the magazine? Now is the time.”

Anna McGuire, a Muggleborn, was firmly on board. Roy Thomas stood by his friend Anna. Jane Creevey saw this magazine as a huge career move; she wasn’t about to give up when her name was beginning to be recognized. Gloria hesitated.

“I already have pressure from my family and friends to leave the magazine,” she admitted. “I apologize, Astoria, for my part in pushing the magazine out early and for writing the article about your core beliefs without your consent. I... I... knew it would cause you trouble, but I didn’t think it would be this serious.”

Hermione stared at her curiously. Why would she admit her role of wrongdoing in front of everyone else?

“We’ll talk later, Gloria. I suppose I should take this moment to say, *Never ever* publish a magazine without first running it by your editor-in-chief. I *never* want to be surprised by my own magazine again. Each one of you deserves to be fired.”

Weasley and Potter eyebrows rose at the biting strength of her voice. The *MPT* team lowered their eyes.

“George, do you still want to advertise in the magazine, knowing it will be going underground shortly?”

“Absolutely, Mrs. Malfoy,” George gave an excited smile, “This will be like old times, kind of a Potterwatch type of journalism.”

“Well, not quite,” Hermione said with another twisted smile. “We hope the news won’t be as dire. Our magazine will continue to be about parenting, but now we have no need to hide our pro-Muggle agenda since it’s already out in the open.”

“But *Magical Parenting Today* will be in hiding. Cool!” grinned George.

“I would recommend that everyone strengthen the wards on your homes for protection. If anyone gets a visit or letter from the Ministry of Magic, owl me right away,” Harry stood up to say. “Not everyone in the Ministry will be opposed to your work here. We can get you auror protection if you need it.”

“Thank you, Harry. It’s likely that we won’t have any trouble, but I need everyone to be on the alert in case we do. Any suggestions for our new location? Malfoy Manor is out.”

“Why don’t you contact Luna Lovegood? She used to have ways of publishing the *Quibbler* on the run. Maybe she can help out or give suggestions.”

“Brilliant. Thank you, Harry. Anna, I want you to follow through on this.”

“Hello? Is anyone here?” A voice broke in as Cho Zabini entered the room. “Oh. Hi. Sorry to interrupt, but I’m here to see if I can help with the production of the magazine in any way. I really liked it, everyone. You did a great job with the articles and photography. I’m serious about helping out with a column on etiquette.”

Unexpectedly, Anna’s voice cut through. “How would your family like to be featured in the next issue of *Magical Parenting Today*?”

Cho gasped, “Are you serious? That would be amazing! We’d love it!”

“Does Blaise know you’re here?” Astoria asked quietly.

“Oh, yes, he’s outside waiting for me.”

“Tell him to come inside and join the party! We’re celebrating!” George chimed.

Chapter Seventeen: Trends

Two chapters were posted yesterday. Hopefully, you haven't missed one.

Rights belong to J.K. Rowling, thanks to camnz, and gratitude to you for reading this story.

Chapter Seventeen: Trends

"Spill everything, Gloria," commanded Astoria.

"Astoria, it was wrong of me to publicly embarrass you."

"Why on earth would you want to damage the reputation of the person giving you a paycheck? Do you want to be out a job? What in Godric's name were you thinking?"

"If you weren't happy about it, I thought that I could easily get another job. But I thought there was a chance that the issue would be wildly popular. After all, *everyone* wants to know more about the Malfoys, and who knows? I might have been given a promotion."

"Answer my question, Gloria. *Why?*"

"Pansy Parkinson is my second cousin, and I wanted to humiliate the Malfoys for treating her so badly," Gloria sighed.

"Treating *her* so badly? Do you know *why* she was committed to a sanatorium? It's so she doesn't have to be incarcerated in Azkaban. Her charge was *murder*, Gloria. She attempted to murder me *twice*." Hermione glared ferociously at her employee. She was ready to fire her, but wanted to hear what Gloria had to say.

Gloria looked shocked and then remorseful. "I am so sorry, Astoria. I understand if you need to let me go. I wanted to cause you embarrassment, but I didn't know the whole story about Pansy. I did *not* expect the Ministry to freeze your money and take over the magazine."

"No, I didn't expect that either."

"I do believe in the magazine, and I really don't even care that much about the whole Muggle aspect. I mean it's not offensive to me. It's actually interesting. I think this magazine is really important."

"*If* I keep you on the team, then you will have to earn my trust back. Gloria, you will know about secret locations. You'll have all the inside information. You'll be tempted to betray us to your Pureblood friends and relations."

"Please consider giving me another chance." Gloria repeated calmly, but she didn't beg. She looked sad and apologetic, but not vindictive or angry. Hermione was inclined to trust her. It might be a bad idea, but if they wanted to keep the magazine going, they did need Gloria right now.

Just then Anna McGuire burst into the small office with Jane Creevey and Roy Thomas at her heels.

"We've got them!" she crowed. "We've got the Zabini family on board for the next issue!"

Hermione was astounded. "Really?" she asked. "Don't they have a problem with Muggles or the Muggle world?"

"No, they don't. I asked. And they don't care about what other people think. Isn't it fantastic?"

"It's amazing!" Hermione marveled. Her eyes began to sparkle.

Anna opened her bag onto the desk. Several electronic devices spilled out. "And here is our next feature on Muggle technology. Meet the Smartphone! There's one for each of you."

"Oh, I already have a cellular phone, Anna. I don't need one," Hermione assured her.

"What? What is it?" Gloria asked.

Roy began turning each one on and handing them to Jane, Gloria, and Hermione. "You don't have a phone like this one, Mrs. Malfoy," he said. "Just wait until you see what this baby can do!"

Anna and Roy demonstrated the Smartphones to the team. Jane, of course, was intrigued by the camera and Facetalking. "It's like making a floo call without the fire!" she said excitedly.

Anna agreed, "Best of all, you can call from anywhere! You don't need a fireplace!"

"Anywhere? My cell doesn't work from Malfoy Manor, so I only use it when we travel."

"This phone should work everywhere, even Malfoy Manor," Roy assured her.

Hermione knew all about telephones and texting, but she was especially interested in Mapfinder and Earthwatch. "My goodness!" she marveled. "These maps would really help witches and wizards to apparate safely to unknown locations. And Facetalking would help parents stay in better touch with their children, especially when they leave for Hogwarts. How does it work?"

Roy replied, "The phones connect to the internet via satellite. So you have internet access wherever you go. Witches and Wizards have no idea what the Muggles can do with technology. Our next issue will fill them in."

"Can you write this up for me?" Hermione asked.

"Done!" Anna responded proudly as she held out a parchment with a flourish.

Hermione smiled and shook her head. *Magical Parenting Today* was on a roll.

After the team discussed the next issue, Hermione appointed Anna McGuire as editor in chief and moved Astoria to executive editor. Gloria gave her report on sales. Astoria requested that the team produce a sample magazine for approval *before* publishing this time. In her mind was the idea that Draco might come around to give *MPT* his support if he saw Blaise and Cho Zabini on the cover instead of the Malfoys.

Because the team would need to be in close contact, they agreed to use the Smartphones to stay in touch. The Zabini house was going to be their undercover meeting place at first, although most of their work was stored on their laptops anyway. Laptops should be safe from the Ministry. Especially when shrunk to fit in their pockets or bags.

“Do the Zabini’s have internet access?” asked Hermione. Malfoy Manor certainly did not. That is one reason why she was so far behind the times. Muggle times, that is.

“They do. Apparently, Cho uses the internet to stay in touch with her relatives in China.”

“Will we feature the Zabini’s tech toys in *MPT*?” asked Hermione.

“Absolutely. It’s the latest trend!”

The *Magical Parenting* meeting was cut short when Penny came to fetch Astoria. The baby needed her. Hermione blushed when she saw her team realize that Astoria had left her infant and children in the care of a house elf. She left hurriedly.

Hermione and Penny apparated home to her screaming baby. She fed and calmed Gemmie and spent some time playing with the children. She showed them the new Smartphone. Then she made a floo call to Draco’s office. Suzette’s head appeared in the fireplace. Astoria smiled grimly, thinking that she enjoying seeing Suzette’s head encased in flames. In this instance, the Wizarding call excelled over the Muggle phone.

“Mrs. Malfoy,” Suzette acknowledged. “Can I take a message for you?”

“I need to speak with Mr. Malfoy about business.”

“I will check with him and be right back.” Suzette’s head disappeared for a few minutes, then reappeared. “Draco says that he has taken care of everything. He’ll talk to you this evening at the Parkinson’s party.”

Draco? Mrs. Gray never called Draco by his first name. Hermione fumed.

What did he mean by *everything* was taken care of? Had he transferred Astoria’s money to a Muggle bank? Why didn’t he want to talk to her? Was he still angry? Suddenly, she dreaded the prospect of attending another pureblood party with an ice cold Draco. Hermione very curtly signed off with Suzette.

Hermione checked her children’s suitcases before shrinking them to fit in her extendable bag. She began packing her favorite Muggle clothes for their potential trip away. She would not have to dress up in the Muggle world, thankfully. She could be herself. She also realized that by hiding away with the kids, she would have fewer opportunities to work on the magazine or meet with her team. She might be housebound. Hmmm. Maybe she would put the children in Muggle school. A light came to her eyes and a smile curved her lips. Living in her old home and sending the children to her old Muggle school? The idea was simply delightful.

Then her smile faded. What would Draco do if she enrolled the children in a Muggle school? *Would he take the children away from her?* Bring them to Malfoy Manor and lock her out or abandon her in her parents’ home? It had been years since she had considered Draco Malfoy a formidable opponent. She had never actually feared Draco before, but now thinking that he might punish her by taking the children away absolutely paralyzed her.

Muggle trends were all very well, but they were not worth a knut to Hermione if they meant losing her children. Her excitement for *Magical Parenting Today* began to wane, and her spirits began to sink once again.

Chapter Eighteen: Deep Sleep

Thanks to J.K. Rowling, to camnz, and to all the readers who have reviewed this story!

Chapter Eighteen— Deep Sleep

She was so very exhausted. It took every ounce of energy for Astoria to glide gracefully down the stairs. Draco glanced up at her, but his face was closed and his eyes were cold. His mask was on. Lucius and Narcissa were staying home tonight. She was glad. Truthfully, Astoria felt better about leaving the children home with someone other than the house elves. And she could do without more of her own family revealing their disapproval of her in public. Tears came unexpectedly to her eyes as she thought of the lost affections of her husband and mother-in-law. It hurt.

When she came to a standstill before Draco, he picked up her arm and placed it on his so they could side-apparate to the Parkinson's. Hermione looked sad and weary. Draco's heart softened a bit toward his wife. He didn't speak, but when they arrived at the Parkinson's, he kept his hand firmly on the small of her back and directed her toward the entrance. As in years past, Draco came alive at these parties and was the very picture of a smooth, polite conversationalist. Astoria listened carefully, knowing that the conversations were all part of a political game. She kept her aloof and bored mask on her lovely face. The magazine was not mentioned. Most of the elite ignored her, but she did receive a few nods from some witches whom she guessed must support her magazine. *So, all is not as it seems in Camelot*, she thought dryly. There was a difference of opinion about either women or Muggles in the pureblood social circles. *Very interesting.*

They greeted their host, Mr. Parkinson. He was aging and was attended by *Suzette*? Astoria was quite surprised. She declined the drink that was offered to her since breastfeeding limited her alcoholic intake, and she noticed anger flash across Suzette's face. *So Suzette had ties to the Parkinsons. Gloria was a cousin of Pansy's.* Did all things bad come from this family? She shook her head thoughtfully, thinking that there must be a connection of some sort.

Draco was very friendly with Suzette. They discussed business and tasks for the week before moving on to gossip. Suzette was vindictive toward several guests at the party, and Astoria was again surprised. Obviously, this woman had lived a privileged life and seemed to know some of the guests intimately. *So why was Suzette working for Draco?* Something was off kilter here.

It actually pleased Astoria to be ignored. Appearing vacuous was relaxing, and she liked having Draco's hand at her back. After awhile, they moved from Mr. Parkinson and Suzette to speak with another couple. Draco whispered in her ear that he would like to dance with her, and Astoria's heart began to pound. To be in his arms again sounded lovely. They stepped toward the dance floor and Astoria's eyes teared up as his hand clasped hers and he pulled her close. She began to melt into him. They whirled and circled other couples on the dance floor.

Many eyes were watching the Malfoys. *What an entertaining show we are!* Astoria thought with a smirk.

When they left the dance floor, Blaise and Cho Zabini seized Astoria, pulling her away from Draco to talk about their part in the magazine. She smiled at their enthusiasm and chatted for a few minutes, but returned to Draco when she noticed his disapproving glare.

She accepted a non-alcoholic drink from a waiter's tray. It was cool and refreshing. Astoria took a few sips and held the glass in her hand as they traveled the room to speak more politics. Many faces grew cold and hard when they looked grimly at Astoria, but she maintained her vacant look. Her eyes occasionally traveled along her husband's handsome face and down his elegantly attired body, and her lips curved slightly. Her longing for her husband was returning. When they returned home, Astoria might initiate some... reconciliation.

"Draco, I'm very sleepy. Can we leave the party now?" murmured Astoria after awhile. Draco appeared annoyed.

"I'd like to speak with the Minister of Magic. Can you wait?"

"No. I'm about to fall asleep right here and now. Can you get me home?"

"Are you feeling all right?"

"Yes, just very tired."

Draco helped Hermione out the door and side-apparated them home to the Manor. Hermione was leaning heavily against him, and Draco thought of levitating her up the stairs, but she didn't want help. She wrapped her arms around him and clung to him, breathing in the smell of his coat.

"I miss you so much, Draco. Will you stay with me?" Hermione asked sluggishly.

Draco smiled and lifted his wife to the bed, taking off her shoes, and pulling up blankets. He seriously thought of sliding in next to his wife and smothering her with kisses, but Hermione was already fast asleep, holding tightly to his hand. Draco transformed her dress into a silk nightgown, kissed her hair and closed the door quietly behind him as he left the room.

Before Draco went back to the Parkinson party, he decided to check on the children. All was quiet; everyone was sleeping. In the starry night nursery, Baby Gemini was fast asleep. In the boys' room, Leo had a thumb in his mouth and clung to his blanket. Orion seemed restless, rolling from one side to the other. Cassie couldn't be seen under her puffy comforter. Scorpius was very still. The light shone on his calm face. Draco felt so much love for his children. He wanted to do the right thing for his family. He didn't understand his wife right now, but he did feel that he should trust her.

Penny the house-elf was rocking in the chair.

"Childrens is sleeping, Master Draco," Penny reassured him.

"I see that, Penny. Thank you. How has Mistress Astoria been sleeping lately?"

"Mistress not sleeping good, Master. She need Penny to helps with baby."

“Hmm. Well, she is sleeping now. Try not to wake her, but do come get me if you need help.”

“I wills, Master Draco,” the house elf conscientiously replied.

“Mummy? *Mummy?*” called Cassie, patting her mother’s face. “Mummy, wake up! Mummy? *MUMMY!*”

Cassiopeia began to cry.

Scorpius peeked in. “What’s wrong, Cassie?” he asked. “Is Mum okay?”

“NO! She won’t wake up! Scorpius, I think she’s *dead!*” And Cassiopeia screamed.

In the blink of an eye, all four children plus the house elf carrying the baby shot into the room.

“Where’s Papa?” Scorpius asked Penny. “Give me Gemmie, and you find Papa. Here Cassie, hold the baby while I check Mum.”

But Cassie would not leave her mum. She cried great shuddering sobs and clung to her mother’s face and hair and hands. She kept saying, “Mummy, wake up.”

“Orion, will you take Leo to the blanket fort?” Scorpius asked.

“No, I want Mummy!” shouted Leo. Orion helped him scoot up on the bed. Soon all the children were surrounding Astoria Malfoy, touching their mother and giving her kisses. Scorpius was trying to be brave, but his face was filled with agony.

“Master Draco,” panted the house-elf, “Mistress Astoria need you. Childrens needs you.”

There was no response. The elf shook her Master, but he did not awaken. The house elf apparated back to the Manor and tried Mistress Narcissa.

“Que se passé-t-il? Of course I will come!” Narcissa Malfoy rose from her bed in alarm. She tossed her robe over her shoulders and ran from her wing of Malfoy Manor to the nursery wing.

When she arrived in Astoria’s bedroom, the children were shrieking and crying. She and Penny moved them away and carried them to the nursery.

“You must stay here for a little while so I can find out what’s wrong.”

“Cassie, you must take care of your little brothers and sister. Where is Scorpius?”

But before she could turn around, Scorpius burst into the room with Harry Potter behind him. Harry checked Astoria all over, leaned in to hear if there was a heartbeat and to feel if there was a breath. He pointed his wand at Astoria and said, “*Renervate!*” but it was to no avail. Immediately, he sent an emergency patronus to St. Mungo’s. Within five minutes, Hermione was transported to St. Mungo’s. Harry turned toward Narcissa.

“Where’s Draco?”

"I don't know. The elf just woke me up." She spoke an elf's name; when Red appeared, she commanded, "Take me to Draco."

A minute later her Patronus flittered to Harry Potter.

Draco is at the Parkinson's Manor. He won't wake up.

Harry sent a Patronus to St. Mungo's to get transport for Draco. Then he looked for the children.

"Scorpius? Cassie? Where are you?"

"In the blanket fort," came a muffled voice.

Harry bent down to look, "Hey, this is great, kids. Who made this fort?"

"Our mum."

Harry crawled inside. The children were huddled with their arms around each other. Scorpius was bouncing the baby.

"This a great place."

"It's Aladdin's cave," Leo told Harry.

"Really? Are there riches and treasure?"

"Yes," Orion showed him the treasure chest with real galleons inside. Harry's eyes popped.

"Nice. Do you have a magic lamp and a magic carpet?"

"If you rub this lamp, it glows," replied Orion, "but there's no genie."

"If we had a genie, he could help Mummy," worried Cassie.

"Here is my magic carpet," said Leo, holding up his blanket.

"Mummy charmed it to fly," Orion informed Harry.

"Is Mum going to be okay?" Scorpius burst out, unable to keep quiet a moment longer.

"Your mum's alive, just unconscious. She just went to the hospital. And I think your father is going there too. Your grandmother will probably want to be there as well, so would you like to come over to my house?"

"Will Albus and Lily be there?" asked Cassie.

"Yes, and later James will be home for a visit. Sound good?"

"Can we go to the Burrow? I like the Quidditch action figures," Leo announced.

"Absolutely. Are you ready to leave now?"

The children agreed. They didn't really know Harry, but they knew his name and some stories about him. They knew that his bedroom used to be in a cupboard under the stairs. Their mum had told them that he defeated Voldemort. Their papa had called him "the Boy Who Wouldn't Die". They did know his children and were comfortable at the Burrow. Harry took Gemmy, while Scorpius gathered their small suitcases out of Hermione's extendable

bag. He took Leo's hand. Cassie took Orion's hand. Then they walked downstairs with Harry Potter to floo to 12 Grimauld Place.

Chapter Nineteen: Waking Up

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Chapter Nineteen: Waking Up

When Draco came to consciousness, his first view was Harry Potter, an angry Harry Potter.

“Where am I?” he questioned groggily.

“St. Mungo’s,” replied Harry tersely.

“Why? What happened?”

“We were hoping you would be the one to tell us that.”

“Where is my family? Where’s my wife, Potter?”

“Your children are at my house with Ginny and Molly. Your mother is down the hall with your wife.”

“Can I see her? What’s going on?”

“First, I need a statement from you about how you spent the evening last night.”

“Went to a party at the Parkinson’s with Astoria. She was really tired, so I brought her home and tucked her in bed, then went back to speak to the Minister of Magic. That’s unfortunately the last thing I really remember. What happened?”

Harry handed Draco a copy of the *Witch Weekly*. The headline shouted ***Trouble in Malfoy Paradise?*** and featured a photo of Draco Malfoy asleep in bed alongside a scantily clothed Suzette. The article began,

Astoria Malfoy, editor-in-chief of the new magazine Magical Parenting Today, may be surprised to learn that all is not well in her family as her husband of fourteen years is straying.

“A strong family unit with parents who love, trust, and support one another is what our children need most,” Astoria Malfoy stated in her recent editorial...

“What?” yelled Draco furiously. “This is a bloody lie, Potter! I would never betray my wife and family like this!”

“Like what? In a tabloid?”

“No, I would *never* cheat on my wife at all.”

“We have statements that indicate you were *seeing* this woman.”

“She was my bloody secretary. *Salazar*, I can’t believe I trusted her.”

“Well, the fact that you were drugged could be seen as backing up your statement, as does the fact that you were clearly asleep during the photo. I think I would fire that secretary, though, if I were you.”

“Frankly, I thought Suzette was too smart for this kind of thing. Why would she want to damage her own job and reputation?”

“I’ll bring her in for questioning. Now, Malfoy, here’s the bad news.”

“This isn’t the bad news? What is this,” Draco lifted the paper, “comic relief?”

“The bad news is that Hermione was drugged too-at the Parkinson’s too, I presume, but she’s not waking up. She’s fighting for her life, Draco.”

Draco was out of bed like a shot. “Where is she? I need to see her!”

Narcissa looked up with sad, disappointed eyes when Draco entered the room. She stood to let him sit in her chair and left the room. Draco did not even glance at his mother; his eyes were on Astoria. Harry stood nearby to observe Draco. He was, after all, a suspect, but Harry didn’t want to let Draco know that just yet.

Astoria was in the hospital bed. It was Astoria’s hair, her smooth skin, her closed eyes. A faint rise and fall of her chest indicated that she was alive, but there was no sign of Hermione anywhere. Draco desperately needed to know that Hermione was with him. He clutched her hand and whispered in her ear, “Hermione, Hermione, I need you. Come back to me.” Then he hid his face in his other hand and struggled for composure.

She had asked him to stay. Those had been her last words. Instead, he had returned to the party to speak to the Prime Minister. Why? He should not have returned to the Parkinson party. He should have stayed with his wife. Draco blamed himself and began to heave sobs of grief. No one had ever loved him, trusted him, or shared life with him like Hermione. And he had let her down.

Draco had never told Hermione why he kept the *Daily Prophet* that had announced her death ten years previously. Of course, now it was in his desk drawer rather than on the desktop, but it was still there. Now, he kept it to remind himself of his own personal miracle, but originally it had simply reminded him of his admiration for Hermione.

Draco had admired Hermione from the first time they met in Hogwarts. True, she was a *Mudblood*, a Muggleborn witch whom Draco had been taught to despise, but she had been so incredibly smart! Every verbal clash and even the punch in the nose third year had increased Draco’s respect for her. Draco also had to respect Hermione’s Gryffindor loyalty; she fiercely defended her friends even though they were clearly imperfect.

“Remember third year when you punched me, Hermione?” he whispered now. “I would be so happy if you woke up and punched me again. I know I deserve it. Just wake up, Hermione, please.”

His mind turned to another memory forever impressed upon him. At a gala some ten years after the war, Draco had inadvertently witnessed a conversation between Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley.

“Ron, stop! It’s been a decade since Voldemort was defeated. Why are you still harboring such animosity?”

“They’re Death Eaters. Voldemort lived in their house, Hermione. They imprisoned us in their dungeon. Bellatrix used the Cruciatus curse on you. Malfoy bullied you all through school and let Death Eaters into Hogwarts. Lucius gave my sister Tom Riddle’s journal, and she almost died. How many more reasons do you need? I just don’t trust them and never will.”

“The war is over, Ron. Malfoy was just a kid back then, placed in an impossible situation by his own family. He was supposed to murder Dumbledore, but didn’t. He didn’t kill. Plus, you know that Narcissa helped save Harry. There are two sides to this, Ron. The Malfoys have paid their debt to society and have been law abiding since the war. Quit punishing them.”

“Once a Death Eater, always a Death Eater.”

“Maybe someday you will have kids, Ron, and they’ll go to Hogwarts with little Malfoys. Do you want them to continue your hatred? There is a good future for wizards, Ron, but it starts with us right now.”

Draco had stepped back into the shadows and slipped away. He had been stunned by the generosity of Hermione Granger’s words. Apparently, she had forgiven the Malfoy family for their wrongdoings. He knew that both she and Potter had spoken up for him during his own trial, preventing his incarceration in Azkaban. He had never thanked either of them, beyond a nod of the head, perhaps because he questioned their motivation, but also because he felt undeserving. He was ashamed that Hermione had been tortured in his own home. Torture that he had witnessed and had felt powerless to stop.

Malfoys operated with power, which meant they flourished when they had it and floundered when they didn’t. The conversation that Draco had overheard showed him that there was more to the world than power, status, and money. From this moment on, he began to long for that something more. He began to wish for whatever it was that Hermione Granger had.

Of course, now, ten years later, he knew intimately the generous heart of the woman before him, the strength of the woman who forgave freely because she understood the pain and confusion in other people’s lives. She was also wise. She envisioned a trajectory toward a better future, a path that would build and strengthen the bonds of humanity.

“It’s love, Hermione. That’s the lesson you’ve taught me. It’s the lesson I’m still learning.”

Draco held Hermione’s hand tightly. He took a shuddering breath and bent to kiss her lips. *Wake up, Sleeping Beauty.* “Come back to me, Hermione,” he whispered again. “I need you to help me raise the children right. I need you to help me be a better person. I need you, Hermione.”

His tears fell on their clasped hands.

Harry watched for a minute, and then called a Healer to speak with Draco.

“Mr. Malfoy?” the Healer guessed. “Your wife may pull through. It looks like she was drugged with a sleeping potion. We are hopeful that she will wake up in due time.”

Draco calmed himself and asked, "Do you know if she was drugged with the same potion that I was given?"

"We believe so, but concentrations in her potion must have been greater."

Then Draco noticed Harry and asked him, "We had different drinks last night. Have the glasses been checked?"

"We're on it," Harry assured Draco.

Draco stroked Astoria's hair. Then he touched her cheek. What had he done? He should have paid attention to Hermione's intuition about Suzette. She had been right, as usual.

Hermione awoke. She awoke to the cry of a baby. Her eyes flew open.

"Is that Gemini crying?" she asked. "I should probably feed her."

Whoops filled the room.

"Mummy!" crowed several children. Gemmie cried some more. Hermione looked around the room at Draco, Narcissa, her children, and Harry Potter. She smiled,

"Well, I feel much better after that nap! I think I'm myself again!"

"Nap! You've been asleep for *three days*, Mummy!" said Cassie. Scorpius held Orion's and Leo's hands. He looked very tired. *My sweet, helpful boy*, thought Hermione.

"Three days!" echoed Hermione in shock. "Who has been taking care of the baby?"

"We all have, Mummy," replied Cassie proudly. Hermione beamed at each of the children, drinking in their worried eyes and hopeful smiles.

"Has Gemmie been taking a bottle? Has she been sleeping?" She asked in disbelief as she reached for her baby.

"Molly gave her a bottle and put her on a schedule," Draco assured her.

Draco gave her a firm kiss on the lips and stroked her hair. His eyes looked moist. Hermione held his hand and reached up to stroke his cheek. She looked past him to see Harry, watching with narrowed eyes. *Harry is not happy. What is wrong?*

"Are we in St. Mungo's? I really need to get home. Harry, thank you so much for being here for me. Do you want to talk?"

"Yes," Harry hesitated, "Would this evening do? Here if you are not released and at the Manor if you are?"

"Tomorrow would be better, Harry. I need to catch up with my family."

She handed Gemini back to Draco, and the children rushed to Hermione's open arms. She looked at them happily, wiping Cassie's tears and whispering words of affection into their ears. Scorp's grey eyes were shuttered, just like his father's. She lifted his chin and gazed warmly into his eyes until the ice melted and a reluctant smile came to his lips. She glanced over their heads at Draco and raised her brows questioningly. His jaw was set. His eyes were

still watery, and his lips trembled a little bit. *My sweet husband is back*, thought Hermione with a tremulous smile. She winked at Draco, and his eyes widened. A smile lurked in the corners of his mouth, and he relaxed a bit. Maybe this would all work out after all.

Chapter Twenty: Malfoy Manor

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Chapter Twenty— Malfoy Manor

Hermione vividly remembered her first visit to Malfoy Manor. It had seemed dark and terrifying, especially when Bellatrix Lestrange had tortured her with the Cruciatus curse. Narcissa had since done an admirable job remodeling the Manor after Voldemort's stay. Carpets and furniture stained by blood were replaced. Walls were painted lighter colors and windows were open to the gardens, but the atmosphere was still very cold. What Hermione didn't realize was that it was her own presence that had turned an unpleasant Malfoy Manor into a home. Draco knew it. That was why he was so thankful that she was back.

Because the past few days had been such a traumatic experience for the children, Hermione and Draco spent their afternoon with them. They whispered in the blanket fort, read books together, and walked in the Manor gardens. Draco rode broomsticks with Scorpius and Cassie. Hermione watched Orion and Leo ride on beginner brooms that levitated no higher than three feet. Then they made cookies in the kitchen together with some of the house elves.

Narcissa rested after her exhausting three days helping to care for the children during their hospital visits. Lucius remained in his study. Hermione cuddled with her baby and studied Gemmie's new schedule. She hoped to continue breastfeeding, if her milk production was adequate after three days of no feeding, but was open to switching to a bottle at night. Gemmie had taken a bottle for Molly and seemed content. Hermione would keep a close eye on Gemini's tummy troubles as well as her own diet.

"Draco," she began as they walked in the Manor park with the children. "I am so incredibly thankful to Molly Weasley. It would have been agonizing for me to put Gemmie on a schedule and get her to take a bottle. Molly did it in only three days! Do you think we could send Molly and Arthur on a vacation to thank them?"

"Where do you want to send them?"

"I don't know. How about Rome? There is so much to see there, and it's a romantic place. I think Molly would like it. Arthur would love all the Muggle history."

Draco grimaced, frowned, and nodded. This was beginning to sound suspiciously like... a friendship? Between Malfoys and Weasleys?

At bedtime, the children seemed to have numerous questions for their parents.

"Papa, can you play with me tomorrow too?" Leo asked.

"Mummy, can we go to Harry Potter's house again?" Orion begged.

“Mum, are we still going on a trip to our Muggle house?” Scorpius asked. “Are you still in danger, Mum? Who was trying to hurt you?”

“Now those are all questions we are working on, Scorpius. Papa, Harry, and I will talk tomorrow and try to figure these things out,” Hermione reassured her son. She lifted her eyes to Draco, but he was holding the baby, and his back was turned.

“Mum, will you wake up tomorrow?” worried Cassie. “I tried to wake you up, but you were fast asleep.” Her eyes began to fill with tears, so Hermione hugged her tightly.

“I will wake up tomorrow, sweet girl. You were so brave, and I love you very much.”

“Did you have good dreams when you were sleeping, Mummy?” asked Orion.

“Why, actually, I didn’t dream at all, Orion. It must have been the Dreamless Sleep Potion, Draco,” Hermione responded, turning toward her husband. “I was totally out.”

“Why couldn’t we find Papa when you wouldn’t wake up? Where were you, Papa?” Scorpius asked. Draco turned to face his son.

“I had been given a sleeping potion too and was fast asleep at the Parkinson’s Manor,” Draco told him in a calm, but tight voice. Hermione was surprised. She hadn’t known this.

“So, if you weren’t here, who got me to St. Mungo’s?” she asked. “Grand-maman? Grandpapa?”

“I floo-called Harry Potter, and he came over. He sent a patronus to St. Mungo’s for help,” Scorpius began. Hermione beamed at him.

“Scorpius, that was brilliant. Quick thinking, wasn’t it Draco?” She looked to her husband and he gave a nod and a weak smile. Hermione looked into Scorpius’ eyes and smiled. “You were a huge help, Scorp. Thank you so much, son, for calling Harry and then caring for your brothers and sisters.”

“I was a help, too, Mummy!” chimed Cassie and Orion and Leo.

“Yes, you all helped take care of each other and the baby. I am so proud of you all.”

“And Penny helped too,” Leo told his mother.

“Well, in that case, we should give Penny a raise!” Hermione laughed.

“Can I have a raise?” asked both Leo and Orion.

After the children were tucked into their beds, and the baby had been fed, changed and put down in her crib, Hermione took Draco’s hand and led him to their bedroom.

“Wait, Hermione, we need to talk,” began Draco quietly. Hermione agreed, but pulled him close and lifted her lips to his.

“We will absolutely talk, Draco,” she murmured, “but right now we need each other more than anything. It has been so long, and I miss you tremendously.” She covered his face with kisses and pushed him back onto the bed. He laughed and wrapped his arms around her tightly.

“Don’t you think you will be upset if you don’t get all the details first? You might be angry with me tomorrow, Hermione.”

“Oh, I probably will. That’s why I *don’t* want to talk right now. Shhhh.”

“Hermione, I was wrong about Suzette.”

“I know.” She kissed him on his cheek.

“I should never have jeopardized what we have together.”

“I know.” She kissed him on his ear.

“I was furious about the bloody magazine.”

“I know.” She kissed him on his neck.

“Nothing happened between Suzette and me.”

“I know.” She placed her finger on his lips, and he kissed it. She melted into his arms.

Draco inhaled the smell of her hair and desire for his wife rushed through him. Hermione looked into his eyes and sighed happily. She lifted her lips to his. They were home. Why couldn’t life always... stay... just like... this?

Chapter Twenty-One: So Many Questions

Chapters Nineteen and Twenty were posted yesterday. Hope you didn't miss either of them!

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Chapter Twenty-One: So Many Questions

Sun filtered through the fir trees into the master bedroom suite. Hermione stretched luxuriously and opened her eyes. Draco was asleep, so she stroked his silvery blond hair until his eyes blinked open.

"The baby didn't wake up," she marveled. "Did Gemmie sleep through the night?"

"No," Draco grinned, "she was up once. I fed her and put her back to bed myself."

"Wow. Okay, I'm convinced now. Bottle-feeding and schedules win. Thank you."

"You ready to talk?"

"Yes. I do want to know everything you know before Harry comes over."

"Right. Do you want to get dressed and talk over breakfast?"

"No, let's stay in bed. We can whisper like we are telling secrets."

Draco smiled faintly. "Well, after I brought you home from the Parkinsons, you fell fast asleep. I didn't know you had been drugged, thought you were just incredibly tired."

"Understandable. I was."

"So, I went back to the party to speak to the Minister of Magic. I wanted to see if I could prevent the Ministry's *illegal* intrusion upon Malfoy Enterprises without letting on that I knew of their plan."

"You wanted to use your charm, I know," Hermione nodded. "Did it work?"

"No, because soon into the conversation with the Prime Minister, *I* grew sleepy," he hesitated.

"And?"

"And apparently, I was knocked out too. I woke up in St. Mungo's." He sighed, "Hermione, while I was unconscious, a photograph was taken of me in a compromising situation with Suzette. It was published in the *Witch Weekly*."

Hermione caught her breath and stiffened. She kept her eyes on Draco. He passed his hand over his eyes and his lips trembled.

"I am so sorry, Hermione. You were one hundred percent right about Suzette. I should have listened to you. I planned to fire her immediately, but she has since disappeared. The investigators can't even find her."

Hermione took his hand and rolled closer to him to kiss his lips.

"Draco, you were right too. You were right about it being dangerous to reveal my identity in the magazine. I'm sorry too. Gloria purposefully revealed my game plan as revenge on our 'treatment' of Pansy. She's a cousin of sorts. She wanted to humiliate us, me especially, but she didn't realize it would have such dire effects."

"Did you fire her?"

"No, not yet, I'm still thinking about it. She wants another chance."

"No way. She put your life in danger. In my book, she is a suspect for attempted murder."

"Murder!"

"Hermione love, you almost died."

"Ha! It seemed like a much needed nap to me."

"A nap where you didn't wake up. A nap that scared us all to death. It was definitely an attempt at murder."

"Well, Gloria had nothing to do with the sleeping potion, I am sure. She wasn't even at the Parkinson party."

Suzette was, though.

Hermione pursed her lips and thought carefully. She was back to normal after so much sleep. Her mind was racing and tackling the matter from this angle and that. She smiled at Draco. He was a suspect too, she knew, from reading Harry's face. Did Draco know? If not, she wasn't going to tell him. She did not want to break this precious bond they had right now. She wanted to protect it and nourish it so it grew back to what they had before... things started going wrong.

"This is going to work out, Draco. We will figure it all out."

"The next thing to decide is where you should go that is safe."

"Isn't the Manor safe? We have all the wards. No one can get in. The children should be fine, right?" Hermione frowned.

"Well, it depends on who is after you," Draco began. "What if the person behind all this is...my father? He's the one who talked me into hiring Suzette in the first place. He has also been curiously absent since you've been in the hospital. He's had lots of visitors and never once helped with the children when we needed it. And he isn't talking to me."

"I don't think it could be Lucius. He loves Astoria." Hermione paused, "Unless... do you think he has figured out that I am Hermione Granger? Then would he try to... get rid of me?"

"I don't know. It doesn't make sense to me, because his instinct is usually to protect the family. But I could be wrong. That's why I was thinking that maybe you and the children

should live in your parents' house for awhile."

"We had talked about it before and even packed for it, but..." Hermione hesitated, "wouldn't you come too?"

"Would you want me there?" His eyes met hers uncertainly.

"Yes, Draco. I would."

"You believe my story about being drugged? I don't think Potter does."

"Yes, Draco, of course I do."

Immediately, she was pushed back onto the bed as Draco began feverishly kissing his wife's hair, neck, breast, stomach. She laughed and kissed him back.

By the time Harry had arrived, the Malfoy family was dressed, fed, and busy with lessons. Hermione was leading her little class again instead of stumbling through the motions.

She paused to compare her state of mind now with her state of mind before the sleeping potion. Really, she had been in a very unstable place. She had been depressed and had faltered. Who knew a new baby and lack of sleep could decimate a person like that? How had she even accomplished the bare minimum of her day? Apparently, she hadn't done too well. The children were overjoyed to have her back to normal. Scorpius was thrilled to have Draco in the classroom too. All the children showed their father their lessons proudly, and he pretended to be impressed. She knew he was pretending, and it made her smile.

Draco sat with Gemmie and listened to Orion read, while Hermione helped Leo form his letters and practice his sounds. *He's behind his brothers and sister who were reading by age four*, she worried. Scorpius and Cassie worked speedily through their lesson parchments. *I need to remind them that this isn't a competition.*

Harry entered the scene and watched the family in action. He smiled. This *would* be Hermione's family. Already flourishing in the world of academia. He was surprised the baby wasn't having lessons too. Hermione looked up to see Harry and smiled.

"You ready for us?" she asked. He nodded, so she and Draco rose. She called Penny in to watch the children as they finished their tasks; she gave them directions for their next activity. Then they stepped downstairs to Draco's study. Hermione took the baby from Draco so he could soundproof the room with his wand.

Before Harry could begin, Hermione took over.

"Harry, I don't believe that Draco and I had the same sleeping potion. I actually made it home and to bed before falling asleep, but then didn't wake up for three days. Draco fell asleep instantly, but woke up after twelve hours. I had no dreams. Draco, did you dream?"

"Yes, actually, rather violent dreams. You could be right."

Harry broke in, "We haven't discovered any glasses from the party with potion or poison residue. By the time you were both sent to St. Mungo's, the glasses had been cleaned."

The Malfoys nodded.

"Any news on Suzette Jones?" Draco asked.

Harry shook his head. "Not only are we unable to find her; we are unable to prove that she ever existed."

Hermione raised her brows and glanced at Draco. That was *very* intriguing news indeed.

"I assume you've seen this, Hermione," Harry tossed her the *Witch Weekly* article with Draco and Suzette on the cover. Hermione caught her breath and flinched at the sight. It was her worst nightmare. An unclothed Suzette, well, perhaps you could call those clothes, holding Draco in her arms. Not much could be seen of Draco except for his silvery blond hair. Still, this was horrible press. And it felt like a knife in the gut.

"No. Draco told me... *part* of it. Yes, it certainly is a compromising situation, Draco. Have the children seen this? I seriously hope not." When Hermione skimmed the article, her lips tightened and tears came to her eyes. "Boy, they are vicious. Who wrote this? Was it Rita Skeeter?"

"No, Rita Skeeter wrote the next article." Harry tossed her a copy of the *Daily Prophet*. The photo on the cover showed Astoria and Draco asleep in hospital beds. The caption read *Malfoys Poisoned!* Hermione shuddered at the thought of someone taking her photo while she was sleeping, but when she looked closely, she saw that Astoria actually looked quite lovely, like Sleeping Beauty. And there was her handsome blond prince in the next bed over.

"Who took this picture? How did the photographer get into St. Mungo's? Is my hair styled?"

"I don't know about the hair, but the photographer was Jane Creevey. My mother called her. She also called Rita Skeeter to write the article," Draco replied. "Damage control."

"I'll say," agreed Hermione slowly as she perused the article. "This is brilliant. Jane's photography is amazing, as usual. The writing sounds sympathetic toward the Malfoys. It even mentions that the Ministry has frozen our assets. So, they actually did that?"

"Yes, while you were sleeping."

"It says that *The Malfoys have been punished not for breaking a law, but for publishing ideas opposed by the Ministry*. That can't be legal," noted Hermione.

"No, I think you have a really strong case, but it will probably mean more media exposure," agreed Harry with a sidelong glance at Draco's grimace.

"I can't believe Rita Skeeter would ever write a favorable article about me," marveled Hermione.

"She didn't," Draco interjected. "She wrote it about Astoria Malfoy. Rita Skeeter is a friend of my mother's and has always liked Astoria."

Hermione nodded and grinned wryly, "Of course. Rita Skeeter would never champion Hermione Granger's cause. Still, I must give both Rita and Narcissa my thanks. This was the best possible response to *Witch Weekly's* slanderous fabrication." She spit the last words out with a vengeance that surprised Harry.

Harry cleared his throat. "Hermione, we haven't caught the culprit."

"I know that, Harry."

“So, your life is still in danger. Whoever wanted to cause you harm is still out there roaming the streets. We need to keep you safe. We suspect that this is retribution for your support of Muggles in your magazine.”

“I disagree,” began Hermione thoughtfully. “Here’s why: As a Muggleborn, I remember feeling the hatred and the prejudice towards me. I remember fearing for my life many times. Not just around Death Eaters, but other times too. I had to be constantly aware of other people and my surroundings. That was my life as Hermione Granger.”

“Quite, but now you have become an advocate for the Muggleborn and therefore, you have enemies once more,” stated Draco tersely.

“It’s different,” Hermione informed him, “When I was at the Nott party and the Parkinson party, I was slighted, despised perhaps, shunned, but not *hated*. People were upset and angry, but they weren’t out to murder me.”

“Yet someone tried to do just that.” Harry interjected.

“I believe I know who the culprit is,” Hermione announced.

“Who? Suzette? Gloria?” Draco looked puzzled. He was afraid to say, *My father?*

“I’m not sure about Suzette or Gloria yet. They may have just been pawns. No, I think the person behind all these... recent disasters is...Pansy Parkinson.”

“Are you serious?”

“I am. This is how she operates. She goes after Astoria, but would never harm Draco. She plans these elaborate attempts at murder that don’t work. She’s also lousy at potions. I mean, have you ever heard of anyone using Dreamless Sleeping Potion as a murder weapon? And both Gloria and Suzette, by the way, apparently have ties to the Parkinson family. She could have influenced them to act for her.”

“Pansy Parkinson! But she’s in the sanatorium in Switzerland.”

“Is she? Has anyone checked?”

“No. I’ll get on it right now.” Harry turned to leave, but stopped. “Are you safe here at Malfoy Manor, Hermione?”

“What do you think, Draco?”

“Malfoy Manor has impenetrable wards, but Pansy may be able to find a way in, because of her father’s ties to my father. We *were* thinking of moving to the Granger’s house, Potter.”

“Hermione’s *Muggle* home?” Harry was surprised.

“Yes, Draco can set up the wards while I set up the internet.” Hermione said with a smile. Draco frowned. Harry looked impressed.

“I’ll check into Pansy Parkinson’s whereabouts, as soon as I interview both Lucius Malfoy and Pansy’s father. It seems suspicious that Mr. Parkinson had no idea you were in his home after the party, Draco. And it sounds like I should have a conversation with Gloria Van Duzen as well.”

Draco and Hermione looked at each other. They too were curious about Lucius, but hesitated to voice their concerns.

“Thank you, Harry, for everything,” Hermione

“Hermione, I am really glad to have you back,” Harry stepped over to give her a hug.

Hermione smiled at Harry, but caught Draco’s eye as she responded, “Me too.”

Later in the day, Harry’s stag Patronus came to the Malfoys with the message, *No Pansy Parkinson. No record of her stay at all. Staff memories obliterated.*

Hermione leaned into Draco’s arms for support.

Chapter Twenty-Two: The Muggle World

Time to celebrate! Thank you, Readers, for the one hundred favorites, one hundred reviews, and two hundred followers! I appreciate your support so much since this is my first ever attempt at writing fiction.

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Chapter Twenty-Two: The Muggle World

Hermione and Draco flooded to the Leaky Caldron with the children hand in hand and Gemmie in a Muggle baby wrap carrier. The Malfoys caught the tube and then the bus to the Granger home. Once upstairs, Hermione took all the luggage out of her extendable bag and helped the children unpack. While Draco set up the wards, Hermione checked to see if the internet worked on her laptop. Then she handed Draco a phone that she fished out of her extendable bag.

“What is this?” he asked.

“A new Muggle telephone,” she replied. “We’re featuring it in our next issue of *Magical Parenting Today*.” Draco stiffened, but he refrained from comment.

“I want to show you how it works, Draco, because we’ll need to be able to reach each other in case of an emergency. We don’t have a floo, and the kids can’t send a Patronus yet. This phone is amazing. Even the kids will be able to use it, so in that sense, it’s better than magic for them.”

Hidden in her words was the unspoken idea that in a crisis, she might not be available to use magic for the children.

Hermione demonstrated the phone to Draco. They phoned, texted, and Face-talked from one bedroom to another. Then they showed the children how to call and text. Hermione demonstrated the phone’s access to the internet and asked him which film he wanted to watch. She began to play *The Incredibles* on the Smartphone. After a few minutes, she handed Draco the draft Anna had given her of Roy’s article about the new Muggle phone.

“Read this,” she ordered. “I think this will be very important for the Ministry to know.”

“Are you going to submit it to the Department of Muggle Artifacts?”

“No, they are going to read about it in the next issue of *Magical Parenting Today*.”

“And what does this little Muggle gadget have to do with parenting?”

“Just read. And play. Play with the phone, Draco. It is amazing. This could change the Wizarding world.”

"I don't think the Ministry is going to be happy about this, Hermione." Draco responded grimly. Hermione held his hand and looked him in the eye.

"I know you don't like this, and I'm willing to step out my role as editor if you prefer, but I can't shut down the magazine yet. This Muggle technology isn't just a trend for Wizards to buy into; it's also a chance to demonstrate to the Wizarding world that the Muggles aren't inferior beings. They can do things wizards can't. *Magical Parenting Today* will be the first to break the story."

Draco swallowed. He loved his wife, didn't he? Yes, *he did*.

Just then Cassie came flying into the room, "Mummy! Mummy! Come see what I found in my room!" Hermione laughed and followed her upstairs, leaving Draco holding the Smartphone. In a minute, the phone beeped. He pressed a button to find a text message with a picture of his wife and five children upstairs waving from their new secret fort.

Adapting to the Muggle world wasn't an easy adjustment for the Malfoy family. Draco quite frankly hated it. Hermione did her best to smooth the transition, but even she had trouble. When the children wanted a play structure to climb in the backyard, Hermione couldn't magically make one appear. She had to call a Muggle to install one and pay them a tremendous sum to have it built quickly. When the groceries ran out, she didn't have a house elf to magically produce food. Transportation was most difficult, because while she could apparate to Diagon Alley, she couldn't apparate to a shop in the Muggle world, and she couldn't apparate anywhere with five children. There was no nearby floo to take the children places. They had to use the bus, cab, or tube. Scorpius couldn't fly his broomstick and wasn't very enthusiastic about riding a bike. She did attempt to get the children outside on an adventure every day, but it seemed that in spite of her efforts, they stayed home watching far too many films and reading far too many books. After two weeks in the Granger home, everyone wished to return home to the Manor!

Hermione spent quite a bit of time on her laptop researching Earthwatch. Looking down at the world from above was fascinating to her. It was like a view from a broomstick or an airplane. She zoomed in to the Granger home easily. She found Malfoy Manor, which surprised her. She checked Diagon Alley, but it was just a blurry small street. None of the internal expandable magic of Diagon Alley could be detected on Earthwatch. Number 12 Grimmauld Place was just a skinny sliver of a house, barely detectable. She found a blurry village that could be Hogsmeade, then searched around the area for Hogwarts. No one could locate Hogwarts, right? *Wrong!* There it was! She zoomed out to mountains, Scotland, the UK, Europe, the world. Then she zoomed in to Europe, the UK, Scotland, the mountains, and *Hogwarts!* This was a breach in Wizarding security that the Ministry needed to know about right away. It was a violation of the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy that had been signed in 1689!

Just then the doorbell rang, and Hermione leaped to her feet. She closed her laptop before nervously looking through the window. *Silly*, she thought as she opened the door. The wards would keep out Death Eaters or Pansy Parkinson or anyone else not permitted. Her visitors turned out to be Anna McGuire and Roy Thomas, so she lowered the wards and invited them in.

“We’re ready! We’re ready to show you the new issue!” Anna sang. “It feels like Christmas! We can’t wait for you to see it!”

Hermione clapped her hands joyfully and led them to the kitchen. She fortunately had homemade cookies and milk to serve them.

“Cookies and milk. This is great.” Roy munched enthusiastically.

“Where are the children today?” asked Anna.

“Upstairs in their secret fort,” replied Hermione.

“Secret fort? Can we check it out?” Anna begged, and Roy looked interested as well.

“No, you can’t. It’s secret. Show me your masterpiece,” commanded Astoria, and they complied.

The glossy magazine had Blaise, Cho, and their young son Damian on the cover. Hermione turned the page to see Astoria Malfoy listed as executive editor.

“We listed your name. Would you like us to change that?” Anna anxiously inquired.

Hermione smiled at her. “We’ll see. I want Draco to make that decision.”

The articles focused on a wide range of subjects from *Ask Molly*, *Tips from St. Mungo’s*, *Rules of Etiquette*, *Books Your Children Will Love*, *Latest Wizarding Toys*, to *Muggle Technology*. She flipped first to *Muggle Technology*, apologetically skipping the articles on children’s clothing and playroom furniture. Roy had designed a beautiful spread that not only featured the Smartphone, it showed Facetalking pictures moving as people pressed the buttons and chatted to each other. The article was divided up into sections: *What’s Trendy in the Muggle World*, *How Muggle Technology Benefits Wizarding Families*, and *Dangers of Muggle Technology*. Hermione perused the article, impressed with her staff.

“This is brilliant. So eye-opening. I hope the Ministry sees this like we do.”

Next Hermione stopped at the feature of the Zabini family. Jane had shot beautiful footage of the Zabinis flying an enchanted dragon kite. The colors were vivid, and the magical moving pictures showed the dragon kite zooming through the air. But then Blaise paused from dragon flying... to answer his Smart phone? *Unreal*. Another picture showed the family cooking dinner together. *What? No house elves?* Hermione thought in admiration. Cho was shown at her computer conversing with family from China. Their son was showed whizzing through math problems using a colorful magical abacus. The final shot was a formal picture of the slender, dark-haired Zabini family, looking into the reader’s eyes with grace and poise.

“Wow, Jane’s photos are lovely,” breathed Hermione. The feature was so much easier to enjoy when it wasn’t her own family in the limelight. She turned the page to *Rules of Etiquette* by Cho Chang Zabini and gasped. She was shocked to see a photo of Narcissa Malfoy! Clearly, Cho had interviewed Narcissa on the finer details of functioning as an elite Pureblood society wife. Once Hermione got over her initial surprise, she found herself wanting to devour the article. There were likely important tips for her to learn here.

“I’m not sure how Draco will feel about this article,” she mentioned calmly.

“We know,” agreed Anna. “We thought you should see it as we envisioned it first. We can take Mrs. Malfoy out entirely without ruining the content. Her photo gives the interview more credibility, obviously.”

“Brilliant work, both of you. Roy, I really like the layout. Let me read it more carefully before I give the go ahead. We may have to make some adjustments. Now, come over here. I want to show you what I just found on Earthwatch.” Hermione opened her laptop and beckoned Roy to come closer. Then she zoomed in and out, landing on a fuzzy picture of Hogwarts.

“Muggles can find us,” she announced solemnly. “Should we add this to your article or go directly to the Ministry?”

A huge bang at the front door interrupted their conversation before anyone could reply. Hermione jumped up, sped to the open door, and stopped in her tracks.

It was *Pansy Parkinson*.

Hermione backed up slowly into the kitchen to Anna and Roy.

“Anna, did you tell Gloria that we were meeting here?”

“No,” Anna glanced at Roy with alarm. “What’s going on?”

“It’s an emergency!” Hermione whispered urgently. “Call Draco and tell him that *Pansy Parkinson* is here! Send him a text too. His number is on my phone on the table. I’ll send a Patronus to Harry Potter. And I need the two of you upstairs to keep the children safe. Get your wands out!”

Before she confronted Pansy, she sent her Patronus to both Draco and Harry Potter, *Pansy’s here! Come quickly! Granger House!*

Chapter Twenty-Three: Magic

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Chapter Twenty-Three: Magic

“Let me in, *Granger*, or I will blast this house to pieces,” snarled Pansy Parkinson from the doorway.

Hermione breathed a sighed of relief. The wards were holding. Pansy hadn’t actually entered.

“Or I can always blast your Muggle neighbors’ houses to pieces,” Pansy threatened.

Hermione scanned her home quickly. She wanted to isolate Pansy from her Muggle neighbors and her children at the same time.

“Why, *Pansy Parkinson*, fancy meeting you here,” Astoria drawled.

“Cut the act. I know who you really are, *Hermione Granger*.” Pansy looked furious, very unbalanced. “Now, let me in.”

Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin, thought Hermione, but when Pansy waved her wand to destroy the beautiful weeping willow in the front yard, she changed her mind.

“Certainly, let me just lower the wards for you,” she said hospitably. And she did lower the ward to the front door, but not before she had waved her wand whispering *Protego Totalum* to cast a shield around the spacious entryway and added a quick *Fianto Duri* to strengthen it. There was no way she would permit Pansy to reach her children. Pansy was now trapped in the entryway of the Granger house, and Hermione was trapped with her.

“However did you find me?” she asked Pansy.

Pansy grinned with self-satisfaction, “I’m much smarter than you know, *darling Astoria*. I know this is Hermione Granger’s old home. It took me awhile, but knowing your *true* name made it easier.”

Keep her talking. She might forget to use her wand.

“*Deprimo!*”

No such luck, thought Hermione as an explosion caused the walls to fall inward. *Wait... inward?*

“*Mura Erecto!*” she counteracted. The walls lifted back into place. That was the spell she thought she should have tried when the chimney fell on her ten years before, ending her life as Hermione.

“How did you find out who I am?” *Keep her talking*, she thought again.

“Draco let it slip in the office. It was the day the magazine first came out,” Pansy smiled smugly.

“*Confringo!*” She attempted to zing Hermione with sparks of fire from her wand.

“*Protego!*” The sparks bounced back to explode on Pansy.

Hermione was beginning to put it all together.

“So, have you also been acting as *Suzette Jones*, Pansy? It looks like we both have two identities, don’t we?”

“*Obscuro!*” *Drat!* Now Hermione couldn’t see!

“*Stupefy!*” Hermione knew she would miss her target since she couldn’t see Pansy anywhere. She pointed her wand at herself. “*Finite Incantum!*” Ah, much better.

Pansy waved her wand and Suzette Jones stood before Hermione.

“Draco wants *me*, Astoria, so you can leave now.” Then she lifted her wand.

“*Avada—*”

“*Expelliarmus!*” interrupted Hermione quickly. Pansy’s wand flew into her hand. She breathed a sigh of relief, but Pansy shrieked and ran toward her, hands out to grab Astoria’s hair, neck, wand, whatever she could hurt.

Hermione heard a *pop* and another *pop*. Draco and Harry had arrived in the kitchen. They ran to Hermione with their wands drawn. Unfortunately, both Draco and Harry bounced off Hermione’s shield and landed on the floor. Hermione might have laughed, except Pansy was in her face. She stunned Pansy. She added a *Petrificus Totalus* for good measure. Then she called out *Partis Temporus* to open the shield for Draco and Harry.

“It’s Suzette Jones!” said Draco in surprise as he gazed on his wife’s attacker, now stiff as a board on the floor.

“That’s what you think. *Specialis Revelio!*” Hermione pointed her wand at Suzette Jones, and she began to transform back into Pansy Parkinson.

“Pansy is Suzette? Did she take Polyjuice Potion?” Draco’s shocked face made Hermione laugh. Harry’s jaw dropped as well.

“I don’t know. Maybe she used glamour charms. It makes sense, though. Suzette was arm in arm with Mr. Parkinson at his house party, gossiping away about the guests. How would she know those things unless she was Pansy? It also explains why Suzette didn’t care about losing her job. She wasn’t really Suzette. And it explains her desperation to publicly get into bed with you, Draco. This woman is something else.”

It also explained Draco’s strange, almost blind trust in Suzette’s abilities and integrity. He had known her. And she had known him. Pansy had been one of Draco’s oldest friends.

Hermione lowered the shield and repaired the remaining damage in the entryway with her wand. Harry moved to secure Pansy with magical bindings and then checked to see that Hermione was fine.

“Do we have to modify any Muggle memories?” asked Harry.

“I don’t think so. I tried to keep everything contained in this room.”

“You haven’t lost your touch, *Astoria Malfoy*,” said Harry with a glance at the petrified and bound Pansy Parkinson. Draco grimaced and turned to reset the wards.

Hermione grinned back at Harry, twirled her wand, and stuck it in the back pocket of her blue jeans. “It’s been awhile.” Then she added, “Come back here as soon as you can, Harry. I have something really important to show you.”

They said their good-byes, and Harry left with Pansy. It looked like Azkaban was in Pansy’s future now. In relief, Hermione threw her arms around Draco. Now that all the action was over, she was beginning to shake. Draco held her tightly and bent to kiss her, but she quickly stopped him.

“Draco, which message did you receive first? The text, the phone call, or the Patronus? I want to know which is the most reliable.”

“The Patronus, of course. I...um... forgot to turn on the Muggle Smartphone.”

Hermione laughed and pulled him back into the kitchen.

“Draco, come see the next magazine. You have to give your approval.”

Draco sat down in an armchair near the window and began examining *Magical Parenting Today* thoughtfully, turning pages very slowly. Hermione left to go upstairs and find the children, Anna, and Roy. She discovered them with trembling wands in hand, ready to defend the secret fort. Relief spread over their faces when they saw Astoria’s smile.

The two fell into each other’s arms, and the children rushed into their mother’s.

“All clear. Harry Potter just apprehended Pansy Parkinson,” announced Astoria.

The fort in Cassie’s expandable closet was very large and very secret, a wonderful place for imaginative play. Of course, right now the children weren’t playing. They had been sitting quietly, a bit scared from the shouting and loud noises downstairs; fortunately, Gemmie had slept through it all. After hugs and kisses, Hermione invited the children to have cookies and milk downstairs. She turned on the baby monitor, but changed her mind and picked Gemmie up instead. She really didn’t want to leave her baby alone upstairs right now. She wanted to hold her close. Hermione led the way downstairs with Anna and Roy following behind her children. She was surprised when Draco began a conversation with Roy.

“*Thomas*? Any relation to Dean Thomas? He was a Chaser for Gryffindor, I think.”

“Yes, sir. He’s my father.”

“Your *father*? Was he a *kid* when you were born?”

“I guess so,” responded Roy, blushing.

“So, you are the genius behind this magazine, eh?”

“Not really, I just do the layout and graphic design.”

“That’s what I mean. And apparently, you write as well.” Draco indicated the article on Muggle technology. “I might have some advertising work for you, Thomas.”

“You can’t steal Roy from me! Tell us, what do you think of *Magical Parenting*, No. 2, Draco?” queried Hermione, holding the baby in one arm while feeding the children their cookies and milk with the other.

“Hmph. I wouldn’t have thought it was Zabini’s type of thing.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Did you see the Pureblood etiquette article? Cho wrote it.”

“I cannot believe my *mother* would give her permission to have her photograph appear in this magazine. I cannot believe my *father* would approve.”

“Maybe it’s more damage control.” They both sighed at the thought of the horrid *Witch Weekly* expose’.

“We could delete Mrs. Malfoy’s photo, but I believe she gives the article credibility,” piped up Anna.

“I can’t stand it, but who am I to complain? Let’s check with my mother. I wish we had a bloody floo here.”

“Now that Pansy has been captured, we could return to the Manor, right?” They looked at each other with relief.

“Draco, did you see my name as executive editor? Should we drop it?”

“I don’t see why you should drop it. Everyone knows that Astoria Malfoy is the brains behind this project anyway.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. *He said yes! Astoria Malfoy’s name could be listed as editor!* “And did you read the Muggle technology article?”

“Of course. I’m okay with printing it.”

Was this Draco speaking? Hermione’s face lit up. She began to beam. “You don’t think it will be dangerous?”

“I’m going to trust your gut feelings that it will be safe. If you are wrong, then yes, you’ll be in danger. From *me*.” Draco sounded threatening, but there was a twinkle in his eye, so Hermione smiled back. Anna and Roy were looking uncomfortably from Draco to Astoria trying to figure out what exactly they were hearing, but Scorpius and Cassie grinned at their parents from the table. Orion and Leo were oblivious to the conversation since their cookies were currently dueling at the table.

“You can’t print it yet, though. Give me a week. Maybe two.”

“Why do you need a week, Draco? What are you going to do?”

“I’m launching a new business.”

“You are?”

“WizTeC. Wizard Telephone Communications.”

“What?” squealed Hermione as she glanced at Anna and Roy, “Are you joking? Why?”

“I’ve had the Muggle Smartphone and your friend’s article for a couple of week now. I’ve had some time to think about this. Thomas, do you want to remind my wife about the dangers of the Muggle Smartphone?”

Roy Thomas took a deep breath like a schoolboy before reciting, “Muggles have the capability to track the witches and wizards who have used Smartphones, and they could potentially infiltrate our world or witness our magic through the camera or facetalking calls. Our privacy and secrecy would fly out the window.”

Draco broke in, “However, if we start up a *Wizard* business for *Wizards’* Smartphones, we could use Muggle technology, but keep our information and locations magically protected from the Muggle population. I plan to run three ads for the new business in your magazine this issue and also in the *Daily Prophet*, but first...”

Hermione squealed and threw herself at Draco. “I can’t believe it! *I can’t believe this!* Why are you changing your mind? Do you really think it’s worth all the fuss of the past few months? Do you really believe in it? This is *amazing!*”

Draco smiled grimly. “Look at it logically, Astoria. If Malfoy assets are frozen, I need to make money somehow. This is an opportunity too good to pass up.” To Roy and Anna, he said pointedly, “Astoria is right about one thing: it all boils down to the latest trends.”

Anna looked confused. “But if your money is frozen by the Ministry, how can you afford to start a new business?”

The Malfoys stared at her blankly. Roy poked her with his elbow. “*They’ve hidden money from the Ministry,*” he whispered to Anna.

“Oh,” Anna looked embarrassed.

Just then Harry apparated back in. “You wanted to show me something, Mrs. Malfoy?”

“Harry Potter!” shouted the children, running from the table to hug him. “Can Albus and Lily come to play?” Draco eyed the stampede with distaste.

“Soon. Not today, children, but soon,” Harry promised.

“Come over here, and Harry, get a load of this! I’ve already shown this to Roy and Anna.” Hermione opened her laptop to Earthwatch and located her Muggle home. It showed up with a view from the sky and one from the street. Next she located Malfoy Manor. Draco blinked and turned pale, if that were possible. She tried Number 12 Gimmauld Place, but it turned out to be just a terribly skinny house squeezed between Numbers 10 and 14. Diagon Alley was just a small thin lane. Everyone oohed and aahed over her shoulder, but Hermione said, “Hang on, watch this...”

She zoomed close to Hogsmeade and then floundered around a bit before latching onto *Hogwarts!* Hermione clicked to make the fuzzy castle shrink into the mountains, then Scotland, then the UK, then Europe, then the world. She zoomed back into Europe, the UK, Scotland, the mountains, then *Hogwarts!* It was blurry, but undeniably their old school.

“Harry, Muggle technology can find us. The International Statute of Wizard Secrecy has been violated, and it’s our own fault. Wizards haven’t been paying attention to Muggle

advances in technology.”

Harry whistled. Draco looked impressed, but also anxious. He did not at all like the fact that Malfoy Manor could be seen from Earthwatch. Anna’s eyes were large, but Roy was unsurprised. He nodded his head and joined the conversation.

“What the Ministry needs to know is that the castle is exposed to Muggle satellite photos,” Roy said. “They can’t make Hogwarts invisible to satellite if they don’t even know the Muggle technology exists. This is a picture from space. We need to put up more magical shields to hide our Wizarding communities from those cameras.”

“I’m going to the Ministry of Magic with this,” declared Harry. “I think the Minister will be very interested in what you four have to show him.”

Chapter Twenty-Four: Celebration

Final Chapter! Thanks to all the readers who made it to the end!

All rights belong to the creator of Harry Potter and his world: J.K. Rowling.

For suggesting I write a sequel to *Wrong Life*, my gratitude goes to camnz.

Chapter Twenty-Four: Celebration

Testifying before the Wizengamot led to distasteful memories resurfacing from the past, but this time around each person played a different part. Hermione played the role of Astoria, relentless hunter of all things trendy. She left the investigative reporting to Harry who relished leaving the role of boy savior behind. And instead of Death Eater on trial, Draco played the role of an eager businessman.

Harry had the most experience testifying before the Wizengamot. Astoria was concerned that one look at her *favorite* witch, Dolores Umbridge, would bring a vicious and vocal Hermione out of hiding. Draco worked on his casual, comfortable persona (friendly might be going a bit too far) because he knew that a stiff, proper Malfoy could seem cold, calculating, and possibly devious to the council.

The Malfoys weren't technically on trial, but they had significant investments at stake. The Ministry of Magic had assumed that a slap on the wrist would bring the Malfoys into line, but actually, if not resolved soon, the demise of Malfoy Enterprises could cause an economic downturn in the entire Wizarding world. Would the Ministry end the freeze on Malfoy money? Would they approve of Draco's new venture into Muggle communications? Would the Wizengamot consider the journalism of *Magical Parenting Today* to be acceptable to the Wizarding world? What would happen to free speech?

The most confident person by far during the Wizengamot session had been Lucius Malfoy. Lucius Malfoy had been politicking. Discreet conversations had been held behind closed doors while Astoria and Draco had been having adventures, near death experiences, and marriage trouble. It should not be presumed that Lucius Malfoy threatened, bribed, or blackmailed any witches or wizards on the Wizengamot, but he did have substantial reason to believe that any judgment reached by the Wizengamot concerning his family and their business affairs would be favorable.

He was right.

Ron Weasley lumbered into the Burrow holding an invitation. "What's this?" he asked incredulously. "I've been invited to Malfoy Manor? Why on earth would I want to go there? Once was enough for me!"

Molly shook a finger at him. “Now, Ron,” she began. “If you are a son of mine, you will go with a smile. You *will* wear your best clothes. You *will* be polite. You will *not* say anything insulting to your hosts. The invitation is for the entire Weasley family, and we *will* make a good showing.”

“All right, Mum, all right. So do I bring the wife and kids? That is a little weird for me.”

“Yes. You should both come and do bring the children. The Malfoys are planning some entertainment for the children. Let’s put it this way... they won’t be bored.”

The Malfoy celebration was three-fold: first, to celebrate the success of *Magical Parenting Today*, second, to cheer the launch of the latest Malfoy business venture, WizTeC, and third... well, the third was Draco’s secret.

The Harry Potter Family had been the latest cover story for *Magical Parenting Today*; it had not been an easy feat to procure Harry. He granted Hermione the favor after their narrow win at the recent Wizengamot session because he did appreciate her genuine efforts to help Wizards better understand Muggles. Besides the 37 year old “Boy Who Lived”, the magazine featured his red-headed wife, his brown haired children, and the flying broomstick caravan he had invented when his children were too small to fly their own broomsticks. Harry nixed the photos Jane wanted to take of his Cupboard Under the Stairs on Privet Drive. Harry vetoed any photography of Number 12 Grimmauld Place or Shell Cottage. Jane had to improvise, so held the photo shoot at a friend’s beach house. Most of the Potter family photos included broomsticks, so Jane Creevey even had to mount a broom and take photos of the Potter family while flying. Harry did feel uncomfortable placing his children before the public eye, but his family end up enjoying a free trip to the seaside, so all was well. Strange to say, his distaste for publicity gave him an unusual bond of affinity with Draco Malfoy, perhaps bringing the families a bit closer. With the Harry Potter feature, *Magical Parenting Today* steadily gained in popularity. Three more journalists had been added and many more advertisers. All were invited to the celebration at the Malfoy Manor.

To entertain their young guests, Hermione and her children had planned broomstick races, fishing in the Malfoy pond for magical goldfish children could take home, and Capture the Flag, a Muggle game described in the latest issue of *Magical Parenting Today*. They also had music and dancing for the entire family. Babies and toddlers could be dropped off in the Malfoy nursery to nap or play under strict supervision. The blanket fort was still set up for the little ones inside the Manor, but Scorpius and Draco had spent time building a tree house outside for the older children. Hopefully, all the children coming to the party would fit into the tree house, but if not, they could easily expand it. Cassie had used her artistic talents to decorate-the tree house, the tables, the blanket fort-she decorated wherever her mum would let her and some places that she wouldn’t.

Narcissa and Hermione greeted all the guests one by one and ushered them inside to the reception area for food and drinks. Later the gathering would move outside to tour the gardens and watch the children’s games. Hermione was wearing a white dress that Draco had chosen specially for the occasion. She trusted his fashion sense better than her own and loved the satiny swish of the skirts as she moved from guest to guest.

When Harry and Ginny and their children arrived at Malfoy Manor, Hermione grew teary-eyed. She rushed toward them and hugged them happily, forgetting that today she was

supposed to be Astoria. She remembered, of course, when she caught sight of Ron's appalled face and turned to more formally shake his hand and welcome him to Malfoy Manor. Draco followed her and also shook both Harry's and Ron's hands before turning to Arthur Weasley. Molly, of course, greeted Astoria and Draco with a very tight hug as if they were her own family. *Best day ever*, thought Hermione with a sigh. George and Angelina came with their twins. Percy even turned up.

The surprise Draco had planned began after the guests had all arrived. He led Hermione and the Malfoy children up to a small platform in the center of the ballroom. The guests gathered around. Draco welcomed everyone, thanked them for joining their celebration, and invited them to share in the ceremony as he and Astoria renewed their marriage vows. The children stepped back into the crowd.

Hermione froze.

"Draco," she hissed, turning to clutch his arm, "what are you thinking? This is not the plan."

"It is the plan," he whispered back. "Remember when you said that I had married the wrong wife? Well, I want to make sure we both know that I married *Hermione Granger*."

"You want to announce to everyone my true identity?"

"No, you'll still be Astoria to them."

Hermione looked furious. "You can't do this to me in front of all these people," she hissed.

"I'm sorry, I thought you'd like it."

"I'm not a *wedding* type of person."

Didn't every woman like a wedding? Apparently, not *his* woman. Draco lost his usual confidence and looked at her uncertainly. "Will you go through the ceremony for *me*, then?"

Hermione faltered as she stared worriedly into his eyes. When she saw the pain she had caused Draco, her heart melted. "Yes," she responded steadily to his question, but she still frowned.

Draco unexpectedly turned her around to face the crowd. She gazed at her children standing near Harry and Ginny's children with Ron's children nearby. *Ron!* Hermione thought. *I was heart-broken that I couldn't attend his wedding as Astoria, but now he can attend mine!* A smile came to her lips. She gazed at Arthur and Molly Weasley, who was holding a plump Gemini Malfoy in her arms, at Blaise and Cho Zabini, and her proud editorial team, Anna McGuire, Roy Thomas, Gloria Van Duzen, and Jane Creevey. Jane had her camera out and was busy snapping pictures. Hermione saw Lucius and Narcissa near the flowers. The Greengrasses had appeared, along with Daphne and her son. Cassie and Lily Potter were watching her intently, so she smiled at them both. Scorp stood near Albus with a twisted smile. *Something is funny to him*, thought Hermione curiously. *What is it?* Her younger boys, Orion and Leo, were bouncing in the crowd near Damian Zabini. George Weasley raised his glass to her, and she felt cheered. Even the house elves standing in the shadows felt like beloved family. Harry beamed at her, and Astoria grinned back. *She was happy, so happy that everyone was there to celebrate with her.*

When they turned back to the official, Draco whispered into her ear, “I, Draco Lucius Malfoy, take you, Hermione Jean Granger, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, for as long as we both shall live.”

After he finished whispering, he repeated the words using Astoria’s name. Then it was her turn.

I guess we are doubly married now, thought Hermione as she smiled at her sweet husband. The magic silver bond that wrapped around their clasped hands and wrists was unchanged, but Draco was right, it meant more now. She threw her arms around his neck and planted a huge kiss on his lips. The audience clapped and cheered.

“You are the *right* wife for me, Hermione Granger Malfoy, and don’t ever forget it. I love you exactly as you are, and I want you to be yourself in our home and out in the world,” Draco said quietly in her ear.

“Oh, Draco,” she breathed. He leaned in to hear her declaration of love.

Instead she whispered with a sparkle in her eye, “*Now* can we free the house elves?”

He threw back his silvery blond head and laughter filled the room.

Finis

Thank you for reading and reviewing! You make a me so happy!

Please visit my new story and community:

Shatter the Wall, [s/11022138/1/Shatter-the-Wall](#)

BEST Draco and Hermione, [community/BEST-Draco-and-Hermione/118493](#)

Ch 25: The Malfoy Christmas Letter

A letter to you from the Malfoy Family. A bit of time has passed, so don't be surprised that everyone is all grown up.

Dear Family, Friends, and Enemies of the Malfoy Family,

The Malfoys have stepped out of their humble abode to send joyous holiday greetings to their beloved friends and hated foes (yes, even our enemies are subjected to these annual letters). Our list is getting longer, so our owls are really punished this time of year.

I (**Gemma**) have been chosen to write the annual Christmas Letter this year. I accepted on the condition that Mum would not permitted to edit my work. Mum finally trusts me to punctuate correctly, so she agreed. Plus, I was selected because I've been a good girl. I haven't wrecked any wedding plans, pointed my finger at my siblings when disaster strikes (*so entertaining*), or flunked out of Hogwarts. (*For those of you who don't know me, that last part was a joke.*) And now, finally, after years of receiving Malfoy Annual Letters from the Gryffindor perspective, you get to read pure Slytherin. My father is so proud. And mum too, almost forgot.

Many of you wonder how all my siblings turned out to be Gryffindors. It is a mystery to me. With Draco Malfoy and Astoria Greengrass for parents, you would think my older sibs would be Slytherin too. My guess is that my parents bent over backwards to raise their children the exact opposite of the way they were raised. You know, Death Eater education isn't exactly politically correct nowadays. Could be why mum educated us herself before we left for Hogwarts. Somehow, number five (me) slipped through the cracks. Either the parents ran out of energy fighting my *Slytherin* personality *or* they like me the way I am. The jury is still out on that.

So, **family news**. That's what these letters are usually about, hmm? Do you want to hear about our family vacation to Greece? America? Australia? No, I thought not. The most interesting thing about traveling was watching the parents struggle to balance between Classy Wizard Hotel Vacation Tours and Muggle Sightseeing Trails. We saw the sights, but Mum is always adamant that we travel the Muggle way and see their attractions too. Of particular note, Father got sunburnt on the trip because he refused Muggle sun screen, so he only came out at night during most of the vacation. He should have just used his wand, I know. Of all of us, Mum had the best time.

The Manor had some exciting adventures this year. Part of the East Wing actually caved in. What a fantastic sight! No one knows how it happened exactly, but it definitely was fun demolishing, repairing and remodeling the family home. It had to be rebuilt from the ground up, and of course, it had to be done right. Please come and visit. I myself added some special haunts just for you.

The parents still look young and beautiful, but they really are not young any longer. *Hmmm*. Must be Malfoy magic at work there. Business (that's International Technological Investments as well as Wizarding Tele Communications, in case you didn't know) is going

very well for Father, and Mum still volunteers for various organizations. She also works a bit on the magazine, *Magical Parenting Today*. I hope you read the latest issue. I enjoyed the article, “Successful and Slytherin”. Lately, they have both been working together on some mysterious potion— — a new business venture, most likely. They are whispering quite a bit and stirring the pot together once again. When you think about it, most things they do together turn out pretty well. I mean, look at us kids, right?

Scorpius, age 24, just completed his studies in International Muggle Law. We are all wondering where that will take him: Politics? Business? Human Rights? Non-human rights? Is he planning to go Muggle? Work for the Wizengamot? He is as serious as ever, always reading a book. We are waiting for him to get serious about a girl. Maybe you are the witch hoping that he is the one for you. Give me a call and I’ll set you up. He needs a bit of help. *Just kidding, Rose Weasley.*

Cassie is 22. As you have heard, every single year that the Malfoys have owed you a Christmas letter, Cassie is an amazing artist with a part time job at the magazine. Sometimes she shows her art at the *The Paintbrush Gallery* on Diagon Alley. Usually, she illustrates the Christmas letter, many times she has painted the cards, but this year, since I’m the writer, no such luck. Seriously, she is so radiant, even her art comes to life. Cassie is the one whose wedding I single handedly destroyed. Not that I’m bragging or anything. It’s been a year, and she is just beginning to speak to me again. The marriage is fine though, so that’s what counts. Father and Mother are hoping for a grandchild soon, but I don’t think Cassie would bring her dog to visit us, let alone a baby. The parents would either have to move away from Malfoy Manor -or get rid of me. Hmmm. In case you missed the announcement in the *Daily Prophet*, Cassie married her Hogwarts sweetheart, Albus Potter. Nothing more to say about that.

Orion (age 20) and **Leo** (age 19) are practically the same person. If you know one, you know the other. Hope their girlfriends can tell them apart. Leo and Orion are both training to be Aurors, but I think they secretly want to play professional Quidditch. Maybe it’s not a secret, though, since they actually *tried out* this last month! Still waiting to hear the results. Father is delighted, but Mum is not at all thrilled. She wants them to have a *real* job. Personally, I think it would be hilarious if they played for opposing teams. The entire family would be in a dilemma: *Where should we sit? What colors shall we wear? For whom do we cheer?* Now that’s one way to break up a family.

My turn. In case we haven’t met, I am **Gemini Malfoy**, age 14. This is my fourth year at Hogwarts. I am the only Malfoy there this year, which makes the professors breathe a sigh of relief, I’m sure. It’s also the reason why I haven’t been in trouble. My sibs have all moved on. It’s sad, but I do have Caelum to look forward to torturing-I mean entertaining-when he comes to Hogwarts next year! I’m doing well at Hogwarts, thanks for asking, but haven’t found my true love yet. I’m talking about my magical field of interest here, not romantic interest. (*Calm down, Mum.*) Unless it’s the quill. I do like my quill. I write all the time and wear it in my hair like Mum does. Sometimes I get it mixed up with my wand. That’s how powerful the quill is in my mind: as powerful as magic. So watch out, Rita Skeeter, I’m after your job.

My baby brother **Caelum** is now age 10. Surprise! Next year he is at Hogwarts. What will Mum do without someone to educate? Perhaps she will get a job at Hogwarts since she loves teaching so much. *No*. Forget I said that. *Terrible idea.*

Back to Caelum. As you know, Caelum is, like all other Malfoys, the perfect child. Unlike other Malfoys, Caelum is an entertainer, not shy at all. Yes, it's true; most of the Malfoys are secretly shy, except for Caelum. He's slapstick funny and quick witted with his words. He becomes a different person depending upon whom he is with. (Or is it more grammatically correct to say, *With whom he is*? That's ridiculous, Mum. Leave me alone.) It might seem superficial to say someone is like a chameleon, but I don't mean it in a superficial way. Caelum fits in like a chameleon, true, but then gets to know you deeper than anyone else. And he's only ten! He makes everyone feel comfortable and special. Then he gets all your secrets. I just know that Caelum will be sorted into Slytherin. Wait and see if I'm right.

It's tradition for the Malfoys to spend Christmas Eve with the Malfoy and Greengrass grandparents. We dress formally, eat a seven course meal with proper etiquette, speak with classy language (sometimes in French) , and gracefully open our gifts. Mounds of gifts. On Christmas Day, we spend a quiet day at home. We used to play and read together in the nursery, which was so fun to decorate with a tree and fairy lights and Muggle Christmas music, but everyone is all grown up and serious now. Sometimes Mum takes us to Muggle church. I'm not sure what the plans are this year. I'm sure Father has something in mind. My main concern is getting Cassie to speak to me.

On Boxing Day, we always visit with our adopted family: The Weasleys and the Potters. At the Burrow on Boxing Day, it's crazy, casual, and festive! Everyone brings their favorite dish, so no food coordinates with the other, but it's all delicious. Many students at Hogwarts ask me how our families became friends, and I have to say that I have no idea. Our families have been friends my entire life. I don't remember otherwise, but I do hear stories... very interesting stories indeed. I suppose one never knows when an enemy can suddenly become a friend. *Or vice versa*.

I think our celebration of the holidays is a perfect example of the Malfoy balancing act between old and new traditions. Hope your holiday traditions are special too. We will be thinking of you (or not). Happy Christmas!

Love,

The Malfoys

Draco, Astoria, Scorpius, Cassiopeia, Orion, Leo, Gemini (that's me!) and Caelum

Addendum

Addendum

Thanks to everyone who made it to the end; I so appreciate your encouraging comments! Please do leave a review if you liked the story. And thanks, everyone, for “favoriting” this fic. The number amazes me!

In case you would like to read more, here are my other stories and my community:

New Story

Hermione Granger writes the books. Draco Malfoy reads them. COMPLETE

Rated: K+ — English — Romance/Humor — Hermione G., Draco M., id: 12511916

Interactions

Hermione Granger stared back at Draco Malfoy. This was a battle of wills, so she willed herself to be strong. Ironically, thanks to her Malfoy, Hermione learned a valuable lesson on this day and the days to come. Here are scenes depicting the Granger-Malfoy conflict through the years, post war, and into 2 realities. Enjoy! COMPLETE

Rated: T — English — Romance/Friendship — Hermione G., Draco M., id:12017847

The Mystery of Draco Malfoy

Hermione Granger liked to figure things out. She liked to predict outcomes. She enjoyed solving Arithmancy problems and loved a good muggle mystery. Who is Draco Malfoy? That question was driving Hermione Granger batty. COMPLETE

Rated: T — English — Drama/Romance — Hermione G., Draco M., id: 11368400

Shatter the Wall

His life was grey like the ashes of Hogwarts, like the sky above. That was his future: stone and ash. Until she came along. A story of redemption. COMPLETE

Rated: Fiction K+ — English — Drama/Angst — Draco M., Hermione G. — Words: 2,132 — Reviews: 11 — Favs: 5 — Follows: 1 — Published: Feb 4 — Status: Complete — id: 11022138

ABC Best Draco and Hermione

community/ABC-BEST-Draco-and-Hermione/118493/

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*The BEST of Draco and Hermione, listed in ALPHABETICAL ORDER! These favorites will inspire, surprise, and make you think. Many with angst, some with humor, these are well written stories with character development and unique plot lines. **PLEASE READ and REVIEW to make the authors happy!***

Thank you for reading!